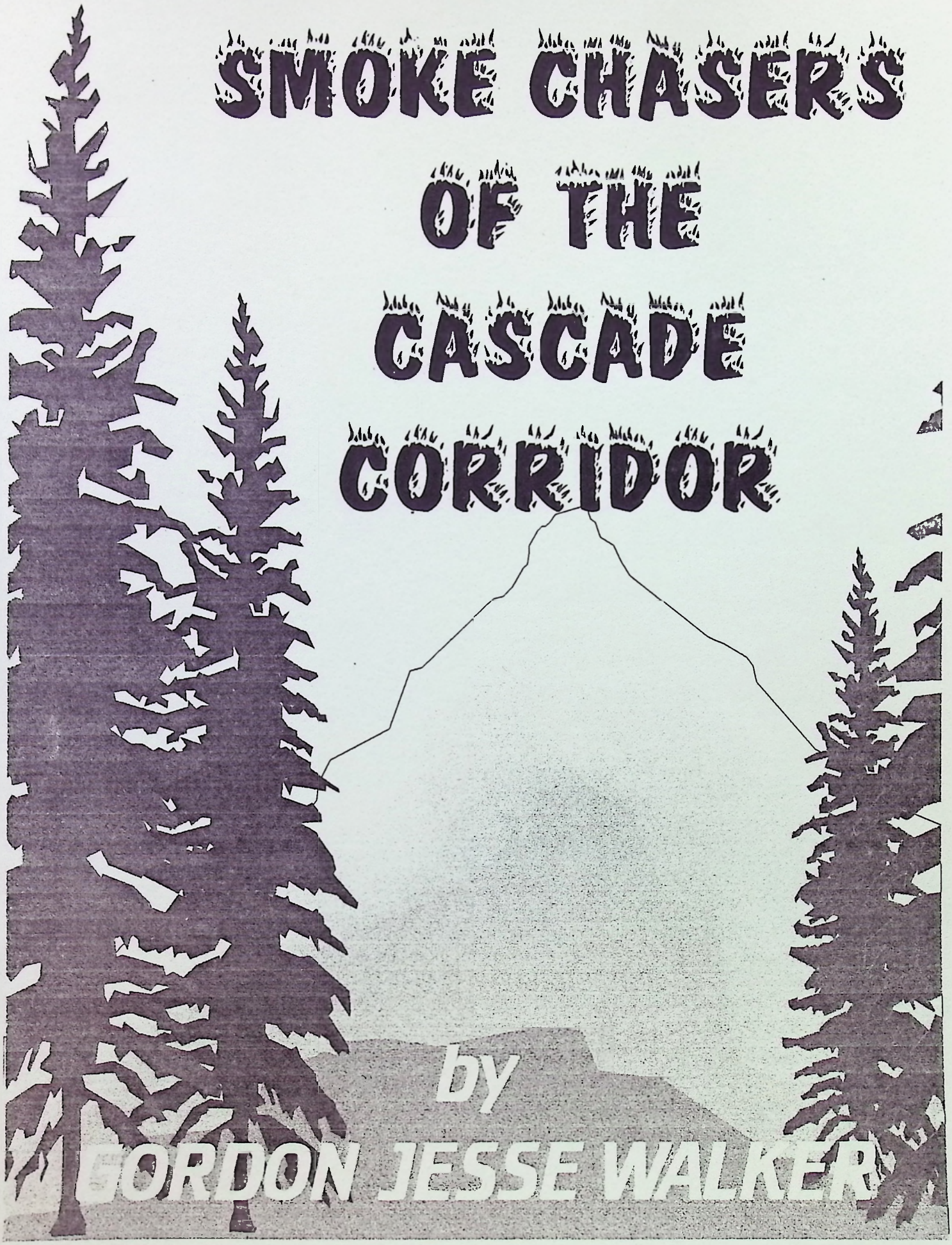
SMOKE CHASERS OF THE CASCADE CORRIDOR



by

GORDON JESSE WALKER

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SMOKE CHASERS OF THE CASCADE CORRIDOR

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This photo taken in May, 1994, is one of the family's favorite of more recent photos.

GORDON JESSE WALKER
1923-1996

(The following is a compilation of several obituaries and notices written after Gordon Jesse Walker's death)

A memorial service was held for Gordon Jesse Walker on Saturday, October 26, 1996, at 1 p.m. at the Conger-Morris Medford Chapel. Walker, 73, of Central Point, died Friday, October 18, 1996, at his home.

Gordon Jesse Walker was born in Lostine, Oregon on July 30, 1923, and spent all but his first year in the Rogue Valley. He worked for 31 years in the Rogue River National Forest for the U.S. Forest Service. He spent much of that time astride a saddle horse leading pack mules. Gordon Jesse Walker was well-known for mule pack trains and for the memories he shared about the Rogue Valley. His family settled and pioneered in what is now the bottom of Lost Creek Lake in 1862.

On July 6, 1947, he married Bea Greer, who survives. In addition to his wife, survivors include two sons, Donald Gorden Walker, Central Point, and Tracy Walker, Grants Pass.; three daughters, Tricia Walker Kraemer, Prospect, Janna Little, Prospect, and Leslie Karjala, Medford; 10 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

(personal note)

Gordon Jesse Walker was a family man. Though he was well-known for so many things, he was happy when he was surrounded by his kids and grandkids. We have good memories of the occasions when we were able to be together as a family. He will always be missed...

T.W.K.

FOREWORD

Gordon Jesse Walker will always be remembered by the people who knew him for his stories. Whether you were meeting him for the first time or knew him well, whether you met him by chance or on purpose, one thing was certain, you would hear a story while you were with him.

This book of his experiences as a fire fighter in the forests of Southern Oregon was one we were working on when he passed away. Even though we worked on it for many months, he was unable to concentrate on the process. Eventually the project was shelved, and the whole family just worked on keeping Daddy comfortable.

But...this will not be the last book of Gordon Jesse Walker's experiences you will see. With his blessing, and at his request, I will continue to process the drawer full of handwritten manuscripts he left. I have read some of the most funny stories as I have gone through his writings. You will laugh and maybe even shed a few tears as you read the accounts of some of his experiences. There are several books yet to be printed, and many short stories that will be grouped together to make complete books. And so, with each new book, his memory will live on...

With love and dedication,
His daughter,
Tricia Walker Kraemer

SMOKE CHASERS OF THE CASCADE CORRIDOR

by GORDEN JESSE WALKER

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SMOKE CHASERS OF THE CASCADE CORRIDOR
INTRODUCTION

In 1953, I started to work for the U.S. Forest Service. At that time I was introduced to the faithful old Government mules.

I was stationed at a place called Lodgepole Guard Station on the Butte Falls District. My main job was to chase smoke, and I was the one who made the initial attack on any fire, regardless of cause, within my area of responsibility.

I had to travel alone, many times at night, through rough country and a variety of weather conditions. A smoke chaser had to use common sense and be able to rough it for days at a time and recognize danger, especially traveling on foot at night.

There were times when there was no choice but to keep moving. Yet there were areas where it was safer to hole up until daylight than to continue on.

Before I got the job, there was an intensive training session to go through. It paid off to be attentive and learn all that was taught to us smoke chasers of the tall and uncut.

The following true stories are about my smoke chasing years both alone and with other top notch fire fighters. Being a smoke chasing mule skinner was one of the greatest challenges of my life. It was one of the most rugged, toughest, meanest undertakings I've ever experienced. But as I look back, it was one of the most rewarding jobs I ever had.

GORDON JESSE WALKER

CHAPTER ONE
SMOKE CHASING...FIRE FIGHTING...TRAINING

At one time there were six districts on the Rogue River National Forest. By 1953, it was reduced to five. Every year, generally the 3rd week in June, a school to teach fire fighters and smoke chasers was put on at a place called Camp Two, located on the Butte Falls District.

On site were several barracks that would house the trainees, and buildings where instructors and overhead personnel stayed. Over to one side was a large bath house and a storage room. Nearby was a huge mess hall where 120 men were fed at a time. Also there were smaller buildings used as classrooms.

Camp Two was originally constructed to house the CCC men during Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term as President of the United States. When the CCC troops were disbanded, the U.S. Forest Service took over the responsibility of maintaining the buildings. It was leased out to church groups and other organizations and, of course, it was used as a training center for fire fighters for the entire Rogue Forest.

On a bright sun-shiny day on a Monday morning of the 3rd week in June, 1953, all Butte Falls trainees and instructors headed for fire school. This sort of thing was all new to me, although I had heard a lot of rumors about what it was like.

All my life I had hated school or training of any kind, but somehow this was different. The basic requirements were to be rugged and able to work during some long hard hours ahead. The instructors were to teach us how to spot a forest fire, look for it by use of a compass and how to die it out. Every smoke chaser was to be able to chop down a 36 inch diameter tree with an axe or Pulaski. Also, he must be able to travel alone through dense forest, day or night, to find a fire by using a compass.

Such things as that is what spurred me on because I was born and raised in the hills and felt at home in any wilderness environment. A good many trainees were men who were working their way through school. There were school teachers and coaches who hired out to do something pertaining to fire. But regardless whether or not they were to be stationed on a fire lookout, trail crew, road crew or whatever the summer job was, each man had to go through the rigors of fire school. Some of those men were mighty soft and their hands uncalloused.

Our first day, Monday, was basically an orientation and get-acquainted time. Also each man would receive his schedule for class and where they were held. There were three full days of intensive training and

one day would be devoted to test time. Many questions would be asked, and qualified instructors would give an answer.

Tuesday morning at 8 o'clock sharp there were 12 men sitting at a long table, six on each side. We were furnished a district map, one inch equaled a mile. Our instructor was a seasoned old-timer and he knew his stuff. But, I'll tell you what, it was nearly a lost cause for me because I was seated on the north side of the table. That meant that the north side of my map was pointed south. I knew my directions well, but for every problem the instructor set forth I was always a half turn off.

We learned what was meant by township, range, sections, and quarter sections. Also, we learned how to use a compass and protractor. All trainees studied and learned for the first half day. Lunch time was dandy. Boy howdy, what a feed we had! The government furnished the food by the pickup load and hired three cooks with flunkies (helpers) to cook and dish it up.

At 1 o'clock we were to meet back at our classroom and receive instructions as to what was going to happen next. We were escorted to a cleared off area southwest of camp. Now was our chance to see if we were going to become smoke chasers.

Each man was given an azimuth to follow with our compasses. That was our direction of travel in a straight line for one mile. If we followed instructions, at the end of a mile, a tree stump or big tree would have a number on it. The numbers were from 1 to 6. My number was 2.

A compass is to be held with both hands at the center of your body so a feller can look straight down at it. As you get lined up you do not turn or move your hands to line the compass up. You turn your entire body to get a true reading.

Once you are headed on the correct tangent, you look down at the compass, then look up in that direction. The very first thing you see out ahead is where you walk to. It could be a tall tree, big rock, or anything that is in line.

As he works his way to the object the trainee must count his paces. Two steps equal one pace. Ten paces equal one chain or 66 1/3 feet. All this info is jotted down in a notebook so you can keep track of distance and see when you have walked one mile.

When you get to the object you spotted, you go around on the other side with your back to it and take another reading. This procedure is kept up until you arrive at the fire.

I walked and counted for an hour or so. According to my calculations my #2 ought to be showing up any time. Five minutes later, sure enough!

There was a big red #2 on a five foot tree stump with red ribbon hanging around on tree limbs. One of the instructors was sitting there with a big grin on his face. I was a half chain off to the right and about the same distance from the fire. The instructor was pleased. Said if a man got that close he could smell the smoke anyhow.

It was amusing to listen to stories from the other students back at camp. One big guy lost track of his paces when he walked around a bush and jumped a momma bear. Another guy stirred up a yellow jacket nest. Said he was moving out so fast he couldn't count his paces.

There was one smart man who really paid close attention to the instructor. By making marks on a sheet of newsprint on the wall, he showed us the fine points of what he called the "off-set" method. It was to be used when a smoke chaser came to a cliff or some object he couldn't go through or climb over. The idea was to count paces to the obstacle, mark them down, then turn at right angles, follow a straight line until he is past the barrier, counting paces as he goes and take note. Turn right again and follow the original azimuth until the route is clear and open. Turn right angles again and go back, counting the number of paces that he walked on the other right angle tangent. That would put him right back on his original course.

Anyhow, the smart guy did just that until he came to a road that went straight for a long ways. His calculations were correct. He walked right to his fire using the off-set method and never had to beat the brush more than a hundred yards.

Right about then I knew that being a smoke chaser was going to be lots of fun, excitement, and a chance to meet a new challenge beyond comprehension.

Before we left the classroom after our first day's training, an instructor came by and briefed us on tomorrow's activities. There would be two hours of classroom instruction and demonstrations, and six hours of actual experience. The course would be on small fire suppression.

After supper that day, a baseball game was organized, and everyone had lots of fun. It was a perfect way for trainees to get acquainted.

The barracks I spent the night in was long enough to accommodate 20 men. There was a door at each end and one in the center on the east side. Across from the side door in the center of the room was a wood heating stove. It was a 55 gallon drum with a door in one end and was set up on legs. A six inch stove pipe went up through the roof to vent smoke.

Around the stove was a wooden frame six feet long and maybe five feet wide, filled with sand so hot sparks wouldn't pop out and set the

building on fire. It was warm enough so we didn't have to light a fire.

My cot was five men from the south end on the west side. All lights (gas lanterns) were to be out by 9 p.m. I snuggled down into my sleeping bag, and it was then that I realized I was pooped out. It had been a long day.

I lay there sort of thinking about some of the new things that happened to me that day, and someone started to snore, about three men to the north. It was a funny, gurgling sound like he was breathing through a cup of water. Soon another man started in. His snoring started out like he was getting in tune. Then he really got with it. It sounded like a steam whistle full of holes. The rhythm stayed the same. In five minutes or so, six men were long gone into dream land. I had never heard such a variety of noises caused by snoring before. About that time I fell asleep. The next thing I knew it was daybreak.

Wednesday, day #2. Everyone was up and at 'em. The place was like a beehive. The head cook came to a side door on the mess hall and started banging away on a big steel triangle. Boy, did that draw attention! There was a good variety of rib sticking food for breakfast.

Exactly at 8 o'clock a.m., again everyone was seated in the classroom, all twelve of us. Each man was a little wiser from yesterday's workout, and I was sure today would be no different except maybe worse.

For the next couple hours we listened and watched as things unfolded before us. It was plain to see that there are only three things that cause a fire to burn. They are fuel, oxygen, and heat. Eliminate any one of these, and the fire goes out. That sounded simple enough. I was ready to go check it out.

We were taken to a site down the old military road about a half mile west of Four Bit Ford. From what we could see from the parking area there were some huge piles of debris consisting of dry limbs and long chunks, and what looked like quite a few pitchy poles and log ends.

Right near a big pile was a three foot Ponderosa Pine. Gooey pitch was bubbled up on and around a large scar on the brush pile side. My first thought was, surely they won't light that pile on fire. If the flame ever reached all that flammable pitch we might never get that fire out.

We stood in a group long enough to be assigned to certain instructors. I was teamed up with a school teacher who was going to be stationed at Huckleberry Mountain as a lookout fireman. He would not only locate fires from his station but could very well be sent out to one if it was only a few miles away.

Our instructor's name was Lowell Ash. He knew all the ins and outs

of small fire suppression if anyone ever did. And I'll be dogged if he didn't lead us right to the pitch-filled debris pile by the scarred up pine tree. And, sure enough, he planned on touching it off.

He briefed me and my pardner on what had to be done. This exercise was called a dry mop up fire. The only water we had was a couple canteens containing drinking water.

Lowell had two helpers. He asked my pardner and I if we were ready. We had no choice. The instructor told his helpers to touch it off. I had a shovel and my pardner held a Pulaski. Lowell stood between us.

The two men touched off the pile with burning torches and stood back. Seemed like every single particle literally ignited at once. Boy was it getting hot.

I made a move in its direction to get started. The flame was getting higher and lapping toward the pitchy tree. The intense heat was causing it to start smoking up.

Lowell wrapped a big arm around each one of us and said, "Hold on, boys, I'll tell you when to start." And I'm blamed if he didn't actually let the tree catch fire. He waited until flames were more than 20 feet up it and finally said, "Go after it, boys."

I was chosen to be the leader or Boss. My instructions were to tear the pile apart, and separate the fuels. I started bombarding the burning tree with dirt. We scratched a fire line as we went. My pardner and I never spoke more than a dozen words while we worked and sweated. After 20 minutes of an intense workout, the inferno was now a smoldering ruins. The pine tree was still hot but there was no flame. Pitch oozed out and ran down along the scar to the ground. Now came the tedious job of mopping up the blame thing. So this was what they called dry mop up.

We dug and scraped all the larger chunks and shoveled the burning embers into loose soil. We worked alone, digging, turning the soil and rubbing burning embers from small limbs.

Close by we started a bone yard. An area was scraped off down to mineral soil. Every time a limb or chunk was rubbed free of burned material it was placed in the bone yard. Everything had to be spaced apart to prevent heat from reigniting it again.

Most of our time was spent on our hands and knees. We searched for hot spots with bare hands and felt along the sides of burned chunks and smaller pieces. The big chunks were left inside the burned area but a good fire line was dug in all around it. Nary a bit of wood touched.

After two solid hours, as far as we were concerned, our fire was out. My pardner and I were two dirty, sad-looking fellers.

Spot fires are a fire fighters worst enemy. While a man is trying hard to get a line around his fire, spot fires have been known to take off behind him. They are caused by wind or a small whirlwind generated by heat and change of temperature. I have seen them pull limbs from the fire two or more feet long and carry them swirling across the country. The burning embers fall into dry duff, grass or brush, and a new fire is started.

The main big fire creates a suction or a draft that causes the smaller fire to be pulled toward it. It certainly could burn a fire fighter in.

To emphasize such a disaster, Lowell's two helpers proceeded to set three different spot fires behind our backs. The first one was nearly eight feet across before either of us saw it. A few shovels of dirt knocked it down, but right then is when our instructor emphasized how important it was to stop what we were doing now and then, and take a quick sashay around for a look-see.

On a small fire like ours we should take turns looking around. On a larger fire, one or more men were outside the line keeping a constant watch. Any spot fire must be treated like a real fire, a fire line built, and mop up continued until the last spark is out. In the old days a smoke chaser had to stay on his fire for six daylight hours after the last spark was died out. (In years to come, that was the only way I ever got any rest!)

For the next hour or so, we all got together, 12 trainees and six seasoned firefighters who were our leaders. We went to each fire to try and learn something else.

Mistakes were made and that was how we realized what not to do. Spot fires were emphasized all along the way. Believe me, most of the experiences we had that day stuck with me for many years ahead. (By the time I retired I had 360 fires behind me, large and small, and that did not include any of the thousands of acres of slash I helped burn.)

Again, at day's end on our 2nd day of training, it ended with most everybody totally pooped out, instructors and all. Believe me, there was a lot of dirt and ashes went down the drains that night when everyone took showers.

At a big camp like that, everyone seems to recover quickly and, watch out, there are always pranksters in the group. The Klamath District people were staying in the barracks right adjacent to the mess hall. Since it was soon going to be supper time a couple fellers and I were sitting nearby on a log. We noticed a man come from the barracks full of men. He looked around to see if anyone was approaching. I don't know how come he never spotted us.

The tall slim guy went quickly toward the mess hall door. Hanging

from the eaves was a big steel triangle that the cook banged on when a meal was ready. He grabbed up the steel rod hanging on the outside wall and clanged away three or four times, dropped it, and ran around the end of the building. The prankster no more than got out of sight, he thought, and at least 25 men came running from their sleeping quarters and disappeared through the mess hall door.

They were in there for about one minute and back they came, faster than when the hungry men entered. Then next thing I saw was the head cook standing on the door stoop with a meat cleaver in his hand and a mean look about him. But what the trickster didn't realize was that one of his buddy's saw him ring the bell. He spread the word and nobody let on.

All the Klamath District men stayed outside leaning against their quarters or sitting on the ground. Pretty soon here came the playboy, strolling along like he was wondering what was going on. Someone gave a signal and everyone took part in latching on to him. Some big guys held him down and a couple others yanked his pants off. One man held the flag pole rope, snaps ready and after they tied several knots in the trousers they were fastened to the flag pole rope and were heisted high in the wind. Everyone took off and left the poor guy laying there. He never moved for a moment. Soon he propped himself up on his elbows, then drew his legs up and just stayed there. He got a big grin on his face when he looked toward the sky and saw his knotted pants hanging high, about 40 feet from the ground.

The whole thing took place just as everyone else started coming toward the mess hall. That evening was when a lot of people arrived to eat supper with the troops, Forest Supervisor and all. No one was reprimanded for getting even with the prankster.

After supper that evening everything went on fairly normal. Some of our men had brought along musical instruments and were doing a dandy job of country westerns. There were card players and a few who were just laying around resting and reading.

As I mentioned, in a large group of men like this there are generally several fun-loving joke players in the bunch. There was one guy that was a sour grapes sort of guy who didn't exactly gel with everyone. One of the joke players kept an eye on the man. When he got up from sitting on his bed with a bath towel, that gave the joker an idea to have some fun. The minute the feller with the towel disappeared he jumped up and proceeded to tear the man's bed apart. When it was put back together the foot end of the sheet was pulled up far enough so it looked like the top. They call this procedure "short sheeting". But, what I didn't go for too much, he squirted

about a half can of shaving cream right where the poor man's feet would hit.

By now everyone else saw what was happening. They got ready to watch. In about ten minutes here the poor guy came in apparently feeling pretty good. He went over to his bed, turned the covers back and just sat there for a moment after he shed his slippers. Then he stretched, yawned and swung into bed. For a brief moment he balanced himself on one elbow in shocked disbelief. Slowly he pulled his feet back. His feet and lower legs were covered with white frothy shaving cream. It oozed up between his toes and dripped on the floor when he swung out from his trap. By now the room full of men were absolutely beside themselves, laughing and whooping it up.

He never said a thing. He put his gooey feet back into his slippers and headed out for help. For some reason I was walking across the yard and was the first one he came to. For a moment I thought he had gone nuts. He started yelling and hollering around something awful.

Finally I made out what he said and pointed the poor guy toward the Camp Boss's quarters. In a half hour or so, clean sheets were supplied and one of the Klamath men helped remake his bed. After that I heard no more.

There was another sort of odd character who was the cook's flunky. He was to keep the wood box full, run errands and whatever else needed done.

One day while splitting wood at the back door of the cookhouse, it got awful hot, and he removed his outside shirt, sort of wadded it up and tossed it over on a block of wood.

One of his buddies saw a chance to play a trick on him. He waited until the guy disappeared through the door with an armload of split wood. Immediately the joker ran over and tied all kinds of knots in the shirt sleeves. He took a long spike, pushed it through a couple knots to catch both sleeves and nailed it down. The end of the spike was bent over so as to hold the goods better.

The oddball flunky was really a very nice guy, and would believe anything anybody would say. Quickly the prankster ran up the steps and beckoned him to come out. Course he never wasted any time doing so. He was told that the big Boss wanted to see him right away, and was waiting for him at Officer's Quarters.

He raced out the door, down the steps, and on the way by, grabbed his shirt from the block of wood and speeded up. Abruptly he came to a halt and spun around. Both sleeves were ripped from the almost new blue shirt. The poor guy just stood there and stared at the mutilated apparel in

shocked disbelief.

The prankster felt bad about what he had done. It wasn't supposed to turn out so dramatic. He apologized and replaced the damaged shirt. Both men were nearly the same size and one of his shirts fit the man perfectly. He really came out the winner because the replacement was a form-fitting, blue, Western-type shirt. It looked really good on him.

Finally our last day for training rolled around. There was a variety of things to listen about and look at. It was a day to recap all that we had learned and along with it, the old-timers related stories about some hair-raising events that happened while chasing smoke and fighting fire. They told stories that caused me to wonder if I wanted to become a fireman or not. But I sure wasn't going to turn back now.

Friday rolled around at last. Actually the week went by so fast it was unreal. That is what I dearly loved about the Forest Service so far. There was so much variety no matter how rough and tough the job was.

That morning every one of us trainees had to go through test time. My boss had told me that no one ever failed. The questions missed by anyone were subjects to talk about when each man got on station. That way they could learn first hand.

I got a high grade on everything, even though the north end of my map was pointed south during map reading instruction.

One last meal and men began to load up and leave. By 2 p.m. the place looked deserted, just a cleanup crew left. I went to the mess hall to bid the cooks farewell and visit just a little. They asked about me and if I had a wife and kids. I told them there was a wife and three youngins at home, watching for my arrival.

The head cook latched onto a heavy duty paste board box. I noticed he started filling it with goodies. There was a fresh package of hot dogs and a package of buns. Some big red apples and a half dozen large oranges helped fill up some space. After he added a three pound canned ham and a dozen eggs, he topped it off with three or four dozen varieties of cookies and a ten inch apple pie was put on top to one side.

He covered the whole thing with a doubled sheet of wrapping paper and pulled the sides together to make a tight package. He put a short chunk of 1/4 inch cotton rope around it to use as a handle. With a black felt pen he wrote my name on the top and one side.

The huge wood cook stove looked deserted. I had seen big kettles and a couple large coffee pots sitting around on their tops. One day I sat at a table sipping a cup of coffee. The cook opened the oven door. Seemed as though the whole side of the cast iron cook stove opened up.

He reached down with both hands that were covered with thick glove-shaped hot mats and slowly pulled the grate forward. There before my eyes were 16, ten inch apple pies, all baked to perfection. Carefully he removed each one and placed them on a nearby table. Me and no camera.

I bid the cook and his helpers goodbye, took my box filled with goodies and headed out to where my Government pickup was parked. I sure thanked the man for what he gave me.

My wife and three youngins, Don, Tricia, and Janna, were really glad to see me. And it was a dandy surprise when I lugged the box in and sat it on the table. Bea rescued the apple pie, and the children removed all the other goodies and placed them on paper towels on the table top.

After the excitement wore off I had another real shocker to let my family in on. We were going to head up to our new summer home, Lodgepole Guard Station. I would borrow a truck to move with tomorrow.

It was one of the wisest moves I ever made when I went to work for the U.S. Forest Service, Rogue River National Forest. We spent six wonderful summers at Lodgepole. Two more children were born to us, another girl, Leslie, and another boy, Tracy. It certainly gave me a chance to get them started out on country living, and I had a job where advancement to higher grades and pay were inevitable.

During the next six years I had a chance to put all my smoke chasing and fire fighting training into practice. Soon I became an instructor. From then on the sky was the limit. Locating a forest fire on the ground was one of my greatest challenges.

The Walker Youngins...in the yard of Lodgpole house.
(Dog Jeffy is the little black ball of fur to the right.)

Training men to fight fire.

Arriving at the training fire.

Gordon Walker and Corbit Smith on Old Blue Rock Road.

CHAPTER TWO
SMOKE CHASER'S TEST FIRE. MY FIRST REAL SMOKE.

My wife, Bea, and three children, Don, Tricia, and Janna, moved to Lodgepole on a Saturday. Boy was that something else for us all.

At that altitude, 4000 feet, we all got real droopy and lazy. The three youngins developed an unbelievable appetite, and I noticed Bea and I did too. One of the very first things the youngins did was to locate a wild strawberry patch out in the front yard. That really kept them busy.

Don was four years old, Tricia almost three, and Janna was almost two. What a wonderful place for those three to live and learn. There wasn't a thing that would hurt them.

Our first evening we went outside and looked at a full moon. Hundreds of stars shined so bright it looked like a person could almost pick a bouquet of them.

There weren't many mosquitoes out, but there was a tiny gnat called No-See-Ems that drove us nuts for a short time. Soon they disappeared for reasons we couldn't figure out.

We listened to an old momma coyote, about a quarter mile away to the north near Lodgepole Creek, start to yip. She had a litter of pups who immediately started yipping and howling with their baby voices. That was a wildlife sound the three little ones had never heard.

Our house pet was a little black dog called Jeffie. Every time there was a strange noise or sound, he would trot over and stand near the three children as though he was protecting them from any danger.

Out on the hillside a Great Horned Owl started hooting. About a half mile away another one answered. Night birds seemed to dive down from nowhere and cause a roaring sound as wind passed through their wing feathers. I called them Bull Bats because of their size. Crickets were chirping and some frogs were croaking away down in a swampy place nearby.

Boy what my family couldn't learn here about wilderness wildlife. We went inside Lodgepole house and ate us a bedtime snack. The little ones would sleep on cot mattresses spread out on the front room floor. Little Jeffie would take turns sleeping on the foot of someone's bed.

At bedtime that night the youngins were so full of energy but actually they were tired too. I sat down on the floor amongst them and tried to talk them into settling down. Finally I had to literally hold them still for a couple of minutes. That did it. They relaxed and fell fast asleep.

Come Sunday morning everyone got up and hit the ground running. The three children ate breakfast and from then on it seemed to me that they ate continuously clear until bedtime. Bea and I could notice a difference in how we felt too. Our appetites picked up and we felt lazy and sleepy most of

the time. But the youngins were on the go constantly.

My new job also included working with pack mules and horses. I didn't know too much about packing, but soon I would be cargoing supplies to fire lookouts, trail and recreation crews, saying nothing about what I took in to, and out of, fires. (Many stories about my packing experiences are written down in my book called, "Six Years With a Government Mule") But my main job was to chase smoke anywhere within my area of responsibility, that was the 150,000 acres adjacent to my station. That's a lot of ground.

Monday morning rolled around. I had reviewed my job list carefully and was all set to launch out on my first project. There was a corner post to replace at the northwest pasture fence, barn roof to patch and numerous little jobs that were put down at the last minute by someone who hardly knew what they were talking about. As it appeared to me, the guards that were here at this station during the last several years didn't turn their hand to a thing. I decided to work on the corner post early Wednesday morning. Meanwhile I would clean up on the loose ends first.

The barn roof was a simple task. Took about one and a half hours to replace a few shingles and nail down some loose ones. The boss insisted that I check in while I was on that climbing project every half hour. He wanted to make sure I hadn't fallen off the building. I spent more time running to the phone than at the project.

By Tuesday afternoon around 3 p.m., I had drawn a line through all 21 little jobs that I was supposed to work on throughout the summer. There was only one task left. That was to replace a corner post that had been rotted off for a long time. The only thing holding it up was the fence wire and a six foot pole that propped it up.

I had already hauled a big yew wood post to the site and a couple cross poles and some #9 wire. I was down there working at the post project by 7 a.m. Wednesday morning. Actually my go-to-work time was 8 a.m., but I wanted to get it over with in case there was a smoke to chase. It didn't take long to eliminate the old post and remove some broken wire. It looked like that by noon the project would be crossed out as completed.

About 20 minutes to 9 a.m., Don and Tricia came running from the yard and hollering something I couldn't quite make out. I was about 150 yards away. I could see Bea motioning for me to come running. Janna was watching from the yard fence. Little Jeffie was ahead of the other two little Walkers, running toward me. I waited for them. I was wanted on the telephone. There was a fire call.

The three of us and Jeffie climbed into my smoke chasing car and headed for the house. Talk about excitement.

I kept my blank fire reports on the telephone table. The dispatcher asked me if I was ready to copy. I sure was, but man, I was so nervous, and hoped that everything he told me would be written in the right place.

First, the man and wife team on Rustler Peak just south of us on a high dome-shaped mountain peak, had spotted a smoke. They took down all the information, plotted it out, and called headquarters. After a short discussion to make sure directions were right, the dispatcher called me.

Smoke sighted-yes, color-a grayish black, wind direction-southeast. He gave me the township, range and section and subdivision. Also a location by landmark.

Quickly I spread out my map on the table, took a protractor and plotted my fire. The azimuth was northeast from Rustler Peak to the fire. It was supposed to be on the Parker Meadows Road near Fry Creek.

Getaway time for smoke chasers was 15 minutes from the time the fire report was completed. I was on my way in four minutes. We were instructed to never, ever do any fast driving to get to a fire. I guess some old boy must have rolled his rig once upon a time and caused the USFS to set their foot down. Although common sense would cause a man to take it easy.

My smoke chasing car was a 1937 Chevy Coupe. I added three more leaves to each spring and put oversized tires on it. A split manifold really gave it style. An exhaust pipe came out from the running boards just behind the doors. Sure sounded good and kicked up an awful lot of dust. It had a good playing radio and a dandy spotlight mounted on the driver's side. The shelf behind the seat was removed and made a dandy place to store a sleeping bag, Coleman gas stove and C rations along with other food and cooking utensils. My fire pack was in the trunk wrapped in a pack cover (canvas six feet wide and eight feet long) to keep the dust off. I really had a nice set up.

I headed out for my fire, feeling rather anxious about being able to find it. The distance from my station to Fry Creek was maybe five miles.

Upon arrival I checked in with Rustler Peak and inquired about the smoke. Could they still see it? The man on the tower said it was up the creek, east of the main road.

I crawled into the harness on my fire pack, took compass in hand, and headed up an old road on foot. There was no smoke to be seen or smelled. Smokey the Bear had nothing on me when it came to sniffing the air.

Soon I came to a parked Government Sedan. I called Rustler and told them about the rig. It was then that I got suspicious. This was no doubt one of those test fire deals.

Generally there were only a couple or three men who knew what was happening. They were the dispatcher and the two guys who set the fire. Every guard and lookout in the country was put to the test.

The man on Rustler Peak got another good shot at the fire when a puff of black smoke rolled up from the tree tops. This time he placed it about 100 yards downstream, west of Parker Meadows.

Before I headed back to where I came from I felt pretty strong about letting air out of a couple tires, because I was sure they were playing games

with me.

Just a short distance downstream, below the road, I saw and smelled the smoke about the same time. Sure enough, there was a real going fire.

Procedure is, check wind direction, and place the fire pack and radio in a safe place. Note the time of arrival and brief status of the fire. Then report in about my discovery.

The next step is to get with it. Look overhead for something that might burn off and come down. Separate burning fuels, knock down hot spots and start a fire line.

I was just getting started on the stupid thing when my boss and the head honcho from the Forest Supervisor's office came toward me from behind a five foot Doug Fir log that had been there quite some time.

They proceeded to help me for maybe ten minutes, mumbling to themselves. Finally the boss said I "did a good job, it's your baby now," and left.

I noticed that what little the boss did at the fire during that ten minutes, he wore gloves. That was the single thing stressed time and again at fire school. Don't wear gloves. I often wondered how come he didn't practice what he preached.

I was supposed to use the dry mop up method to put this fire dead out, but with the live stream of water 20 feet away, it would show pure stupidity if I didn't use water. I waited about five minutes to be sure those two turkeys were well on their way. I went back to my car and dug up a five gallon canvas bucket. About five or six trips from Fry Creek to the fire and there was nothing coming up but steam.

Like I said before, it was policy to spend six daylight hours on a fire after the last spark was out. Believe me, I took full advantage of that.

First I rounded up my fire tools and cleaned them up, ready to be put back in my fire pack. Just in case one of those guys started a smoldering spot fire I took a good look around. After that I returned to my car and rounded up some C rations and my two burner Coleman stove. A couple small kettles and a coffee pot would suffice.

I rigged myself a neat little campsite close by Fry Creek. The Coleman stove was lighted, and the coffee water was set to boil. My meal consisted of three beef patties, pork and beans, canned peaches and some home made cookies. When I passed through the kitchen as I left home, two apples, a banana and an orange were crammed into a paper bag, and I took them along.

I checked in with the Rustler Peak Lookout every hour. No one seemed concerned. I took a nap after dinner (lunch as you call it), and right then I figured smoke chasing wasn't too bad after all.

At 3 p.m., my six hours were up. I called Rustler and told them I was leaving. The dispatcher was notified. In another half hour I stumbled through the back door into the kitchen and on to the telephone and called

headquarters. It was then that I learned about my smoke chaser counterpart that resided at Imnaha.

He had been dispatched to the same fire but never quite made it. I learned later that his car motor quit en route, about two miles from his station. He pushed it to try to get it going, but soon came to a slight rise and that was it. Also the man was called at Camp Two. He couldn't be contacted because his radio wasn't receiving and he didn't know about it.

Anyhow that was my first forest fire and according to my boss, I did everything right. But it being only a test fire, I was sure that the real thing would be much different.

Lodgepole life was great. The first two weeks were sort of slow as far as using the pack stock. But that would change before too long.

Every fire lookout and guard paid close attention to the Fire Weather Forecast. If we didn't hear it on the Forest radio, the dispatcher would call us and clue us in. Of course we had to copy it all down for reference.

One morning around 7:30 a.m., the phone started ringing. Bea answered and the man at the fire headquarters wanted to converse with me. I was down at the barn working with the mules and horses. I dashed to the house and listened as the dispatcher talked. Today was supposed to be a high lightning risk, 60% chance by 1 p.m. I was supposed to get plenty of rest and get ready to chase smoke if the prediction came true. Sounded pretty exciting to me.

1 p.m. came and went. There were a few thunder heads poking up here and there, but none of our lookouts saw any lightning yet. And nothing happened until about 3:30 p.m.

Rustler Peak started picking up a lightning strike now and then. They called headquarters on the phone, and, of course, every guard in the country eavesdropped. (It was okay.)

The storm was moving from the southeast toward the northwest. Strikes were becoming more frequent, but it was a wet lightning storm. Lots of rain and small hailstones were coming down.

The storm covered an area about one-half mile wide and passed just west of Rustler. Strikes were coming down about five or six a minute. A couple real dingers hit in the west edge of Merle Burn. Apparently one of the strikes hit a live tree. Smoke started rolling up and a column was leaning toward the northwest.

Carefully, the people on Rustler Peak sighted it in on the Osborne Fire finder instrument so as to pinpoint it on a map. The fire was turned in, and the wheels started turning. Sure enough, I got a fire call at 5 p.m.

Carefully, I copied all the information down on my fire report form. It was at the lower end, or rather, on the west edge of the old Merle Burn. Several hundred acres were burned off in the 1920's, caused by lightning. About all that existed now was a huge brush field, downed snags and a lot of

tough going.

I was to go to a place on the Cur Creek Road to where I could see Rustler Peak Lookout. At that point I was to take a compass shot at the tower. It should read 60 degrees. If it did, the correct azimuth to my fire would be 240 degrees. I got there in 45 minutes.

Carefully I adjusted my compass and took a shot at Rustler Peak tower. It was exactly 50 degrees. I walked up the road aways and sighted again. Soon, sure enough, my compass read 60 degrees. I turned in my tracks and lined up magnetic north and set my compass on 240 degrees.

What a mess. Down there somewhere in that wilderness of brush a mile away, was supposed to be a forest fire. No doubt it was burning away in an old growth Douglas Fir tree, and soon as the area around it dried out enough, it could become another Merle Burn. It was up to me to get it cornered before dark.

I checked in with Rustler and told the man and his wife who manned the tower I was ready to head out. For the first hundred yards it was bad, but I went right to the burned off snag I sighted on. But, from here on it was a whole different story.

Out ahead was a dense brush field that was so thick I don't know how even a deer could get through. There were groves of Chinkapin as high as a one-story building. Slick Leaf, Vine Maple, and a dozen different species of brush filled in between, including some Blackberry vines. There were downed snags that were propped up by rock cliffs and huge mounds of dirt poking up here and there.

To work my way through a jungle like this would take until midnight to reach my fire, if I was lucky. I remembered my fire school training and the trick the smart guy did by using the "off set" method. He walked to his fire on an open road, all but about a hundred yards. Now was a chance of a lifetime. I would simply off-set my course until I reached open timber. Then the going ought to be good.

My azimuth to the fire was 240 degrees. I planned to head for open timber, maybe 150 yards to the south. I set my compass on a 150 degree course. My line of sight came out to a huge Douglas Fir tree with a broken out top. Just right. Now to count my paces, which was very difficult, until I reached my tree.

I counted around 96 paces and the going looked really good west of me. The big broken top tree was still a few paces away but that was just fine. 96 paces equals around 16 chains. Now to get back on course and start counting.

I moved my compass dial from 150 degrees back to 240 degrees and headed out, thankful to be out of that awful brush field. In a half hour's time I arrived at the end of a mile's run. Somewhere out there was a smoldering hot spot that needed my attention. I felt real smart off-setting like that. Now to go

in a northerly direction for 16 chains, and I ought to be within smelling distance of burning wood, I hoped.

Again I turned at right angles and set out on a course of 330 degrees. Boy, I'll tell you what! Talk about tough going. The brush was thick and the grass was tall. Mosquitoes were horrible. Every single leaf on the brush seemed to hold a half a cup of water.

I crossed two small live streams of water. The banks were steep and four or five feet down to the water in places. Trailing Blackberry vines kept tripping me up. I carried a 50 pound fire pack and a 15 pound radio. I sat down near a standing snag that was maybe 20 feet high. It felt good to get rid of that heavy pack. There was no fire in sight.

I turned on my radio and waited about one minute. That way I could tell if someone else was broadcasting. I took the mike in hand, held down on the button for a few seconds and called Rustler Peak. They answered immediately.

I told them where I was and what I had found, so far, nothing. I was told that there hadn't been any smoke for about two hours or more. It could have been rained out.

My instructions were to stick around and keep looking. I hoped to find the blame fire before dark and that wasn't too far off.

I staggered around and covered maybe ten or fifteen acres and crossed two more small streams. I used what someone called the gridiron method. That way I could always get back to my point of departure. I was really disappointed. Again I sat down and called in. I was told to work my way out of there and head for home.

The sun had gone down and it seemed timely to get my headlight and mount it up on my tin hat. In the process I gobbled down some C rations that included a small can of peaches.

A smoke chaser's flashlight has a battery box that holds four batteries, two on each side. On the top is a two way switch. When two batteries get low the switch can be flipped over to use the two strong batteries.

Attached to the top of the box is a double cord that has the headlight attached. The cord is maybe five feet long. After the box is secured to the smoke chaser's belt the head lamp is pushed up under his shirt or coat and comes out at the back of his collar. Where the cord went up under my coat it wouldn't get hung up. Then the head lamp is attached to the tin hat with a heavy elastic band. The lamp works up or down in any position.

I rigged it up, turned it on, and headed out. Seemed to work good. It was half dark by now. I headed out on the course I came in on and managed to travel maybe forty feet. My light went out. Well, again I remembered what they taught us at fire school.

If a flashlight went out, change the bulb. If that didn't work, put in fresh batteries, etc. I checked the whole thing out as good as I could, but it was too

dark to tell what was actually wrong.

Again I called Rustler and told them of my predicament. I was advised to start a fire in a safe place and spend the night. The idea was great except for one thing. Everything was sopping wet and if I could find something dry enough to burn, my matches were wet. Boy, it seemed to me I was in a bad fix.

After I called Rustler again I started out on the worst one mile journey I would ever make in my life. No way was my compass any good to me because I couldn't see it. Right now, down here in this dense thicket of brush, and hard telling what else, a feller had a tough time trying to figure which way was up.

Slowly I began to pick my way. The only logical thing to do was to head uphill. The Merle Burn was on a west slope. I have been sopping wet many times, but now it looked like I never really knew what wet meant. Every leaf was full of water, the ground was covered with green, wet vegetation, and all my footing was slick, ground, rocks, limbs, and all. Slowly I moved along.

For a few minutes the going got a little better. Then suddenly I fell and landed in a broad, 5 foot hole. There was about six or eight inches of water in the bottom. Must of been where a lot of dirt had been pulled up when a snag tipped over.

When I got over the shock I climbed back up and sat on the edge of the hole to rest some. I wasn't hurt none, just plumb disgusted. For a wonder my radio worked when I turned it on.

Rustler Peak was talking about me. Said something about they hadn't heard a word for almost 45 minutes. When they finally shut up I called in and told what was going on. Of course there was nothing anyone could do except lend a little moral support, and it was sure easy for them to say, "Be careful."

Somehow I worked my way around the hole but got tangled up in something and fell again. Every time I hit the ground an animal, no doubt a deer, would crash through the brush. Sometimes a whole bunch would depart in several directions. I'll just bet that these critters were born and raised right here.

I heard noises that couldn't be identified, but it didn't scare me a bit. I was just getting madder by the minute. I kept on trudging along, fighting the brush and other debris, stumbling and falling and getting up.

It was so dark I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. Now and then when I could see up, stars were bright and there were no clouds. I could make out a tall tree now and then over to one side.

Soon, as I pussy-footed along, it seemed like I was entering an opening. Boy, did it seem good! There was no brush under foot. Rustler Peak was somewhere out ahead. With my radio turned on I called in again. This time an hour had passed by and they gave me a scolding.

The man told me to watch and look for a light flashing back and forth

like a beacon. Sure enough, boy did it look good, but it was a long way off. At least I was headed in the right direction.

I signed off and just stood there for a moment. In another ten feet I got the shock of my life. What seemed like I was moving along in an opening was a five or six foot tree trunk or snag that had fallen, and the small end was propped up on a mound of dirt. While shuffling along very slow and careful, no one would have ever guessed it was the broad side of an old tree trunk. One more step and down through the brush I plummeted, and landed over ten feet below. I just laid there and fumed and boiled. What was going to happen next?

Finally I stood up. There were no skinned places on my body, maybe my shirt was torn in a place or two, but outside of that everything seemed to be okay. Being really disgusted, I trudged and stumbled along and fell down many times. When I would get off balance the fire pack and radio pushed me on down.

Once more I walked up one of those downed snags. It was strange how I even got up on one, but that's exactly what happened. This time the distance from where my body went down through the scratchy brush was farther to the ground. Seemed like I fell for a whole minute before crash landing on a low thick brush of some kind.

By now I was so blame mad and disgusted it made no difference to me if the lookout or those at headquarters ever heard from me again. I stumbled and fell down some more. Just as well let everyone else suffer from worry for awhile. Maybe I might call in once more, pretty soon.

Finally my feet got tangled in a bunch of brush but there was something different. The limbs were moving, they were loose. I lay there for a moment and, forevermore, there seemed to be a clearing in front of me. Struggling to my feet once more, sure enough, believe it or not, I was standing in the center of the Cur Creek Road! There was a very dim outline to the north end, uphill, south of me. But, about one hundred feet away was a huge black object. As I looked at it the blame thing moved around and back and forth. Well, by now I was beyond being frightened and started working my way toward it. I figured if the monster grabbed me it would turn me loose come daylight when he saw what he caught.

A few more paces and my smoke chaser car took shape. The way things appeared to me, it seemed like I did better without my compass than trying to use one. The first thing I did was unlock the door, start the motor and turn on some lights. I never saw anything so beautiful in my life, it seemed.

With my fire pack stored in the trunk I sat on a front fender and called Rustler Peak. It was sort of fun now for them to get after me for not checking in exactly every half hour. There was no way my watch could be made visible. Besides that, time passed by very quickly, strange as it may seem.

Before I could say a thing they asked, "Where are you?" After a few moment's hesitation my reply was, "Right here on the fender of my car." They were glad. When I had fallen down, stumbling over the loose limbs by Cur Creek Road, it was my last spill that night. My car being so close was truly a great thing. I was completely done in. It was really a good feeling to stand out in front of my car with the headlights on. Seemed like I could almost feel the bright light.

Soon there was a car motor moaning away coming toward me. Up around a turn a set of headlights shined my way. The driver popped them on dim the second he spotted my car.

It was a young forester by the name of Sam Dyke. I took a liking to the fellow the first time we met. He was a college man working his way through school.

Sam greeted me and we shook hands. Then he handed me a brand new flashlight. He called in and verified the fact I was safe and in good health but sopping wet from head to toe.

Then he told me what been going on back at Lodgepole and down at headquarters. A couple of people had driven to my station to be with my family. The boss had organized ten men to come to Merle Burn and hunt me up. The purpose of Sam driving up was to locate my car and try to holler me up. If he couldn't get an answer after a reasonable time, the search and rescuers were to be dispatched and look for a lost smoke chaser. I guess everyone heaved a sigh of relief when they found out I made it. I put my car in gear, bid Sam farewell, and headed for Lodgepole. The young college student followed me.

At my station there were two or three gas lanterns hanging from tree limbs in the yard and several people standing around. Guess I was quite a sight to see. The little Walkers looked at my wet clothes, and one of them discovered a single dry spot about eight inches across on my back, just below my shoulders. The fire pack kept that spot from soaking up.

There was a short scratch on top of my right hand and a sore spot or two on my left hip. On one of the tumbles off the end of a snag I landed on the big end of a blackberry bush. There were no serious injuries.

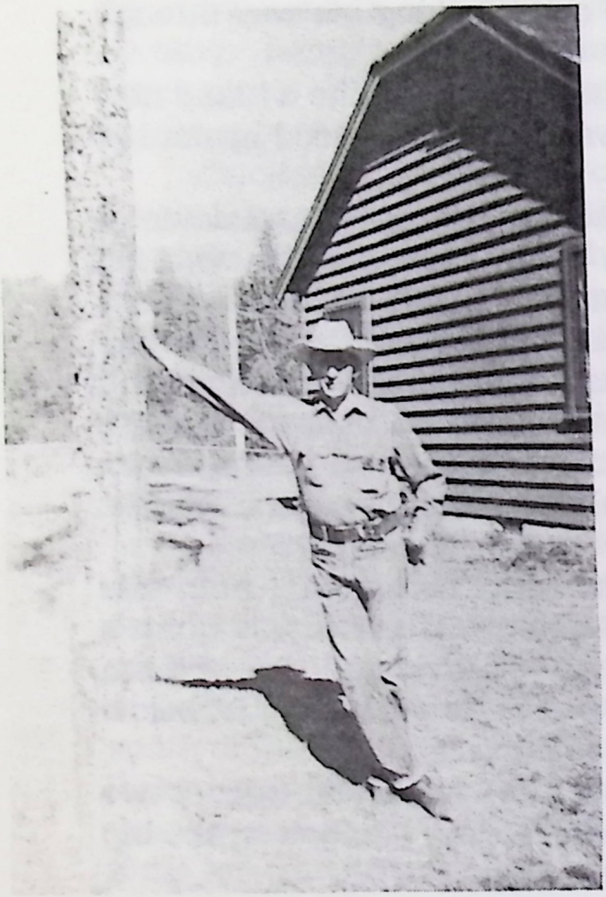
It was then that I took a peek at my pocket watch. The hands said three minutes to 12:00 Midnight.

My boss knew better than to call me very early the next day, but I was up and around before 9 a.m., fully recovered, but a little stiff and sore here and there.

Since that night in Merle Burn I have looked for and chased many a smoke out there in the tall and uncut. But, never, ever was there such a rough time of it as there was that night. It was certainly the kind of experience that separates the men from the boys. Believe me, at times I wondered which way the boys went. What a contrast there was between looking for a test fire and

chasing a real smoke, and I never did find my fire.

For the next month the people on Rustler Peak kept watch where the Merle Burn smoke was first sighted. Nothing ever flared up again.



The Walkers...ready for another summer at Lodge

Livestock...resting up between trips.

CHAPTER THREE
ROGUE RIVER ROCK SLIDE. FALSE ALARM

By now I felt almost like a seasoned smoke chaser, but I knew that there were many more fires to be looked for if I stayed with the Forest Service. And I sure had no intentions about giving up Lodgepole Guard Station unless I got canned.

Every single day it seemed like something new and different would happen. One day we were eating dinner (lunch), and we heard a knock at the door. I got up to see who it might be.

Standing there was a tall, elderly woman who looked mighty worried. I asked her in but she wouldn't enter. She was having trouble with her car just up the road about a half mile. Her husband was waiting at the stalled rig. She wanted me to get in touch with a mechanic someplace, or maybe I could look the car over and get it going.

She told me to finish eating and she would go back and wait. Of course I polished off my beans and potatoes a little quicker than usual and rinsed it down with a couple gulps of coffee. On my way out of the house I downed a wedge of apple pie.

I cranked up my smoke chasing car and headed out. There were always tools enough in my car to overhaul it if need be. But actually about all I needed was a screwdriver, a crescent wrench, and a pair of pliers.

At the cattle guard I turned left and headed up the road. Around a turn there it sat. The big old model car was towing a 26 foot house trailer. The elderly couple was sitting in lawn chairs waiting for me.

I pulled up around them and backed up between two trees. It was then I found out that the man had a heart condition and wasn't supposed to get too excited.

Well, then it was up to me to try and locate the problem. I lifted the hood where I could see around on the big motor. Then I ask the woman to try and start it. When she turned the key, there was only a clicking noise.

It was kind of a long shot, but I made an assumption that their battery was almost dead. While removing the two wires, sure enough I found that the ground wire was loose. No electricity was going into the battery to keep it charged. But it had maybe enough fire in it to start my car if I used the crank.

The elderly couple was doubtful, so to prove a point I switched batteries. Mine was almost new. With the wires scraped and replaced, the woman tried the starter, and away it went. Perfect! I put their battery in my car, turned the key on and gave the car crank a twist. Sure enough, the motor fired up and we were in business.

The elderly couple were headed for Wickiup Forest Camp about five miles up the line. I told them to head out and I would be along shortly and we

could switch batteries again. My car would be driven along in second gear so the generator would kick in enough juice to start their car.

I watched as they headed for camp. There was a big cloud of dust that hung in the tree tops. Soon they were out of sight.

I walked over to my car and opened the door and got the blamedest shock ever. My smoke chaser rig was full of yellow jackets. It was sure enough like a bee hive. Now what was there to do? And how did those yellow rascals ever get in my car?

With both doors flung open, with me swinging an empty gunny sack around, most of the critters exited. It was then that I made a discovery. In the center of the floor board toward the front is a heavy duty, round lid or cap that fits in a hole about two inches across. That is the access to the master cylinder where a cap can be removed and brake fluid added. Just before dinner I had removed the lid and prepared to add some fluid. Right then the little Walkers came running and said vittles were on the table. I let all holds go and raced them to the house. Of course they beat me. On purpose I pretended to trip over their dog, Jeffie, and about fell over a little red wagon and pretended to get my finger caught in the yard gate latch, much to their delight.

Anyhow, where my car was backed up between two trees, there was a real healthy nest of yellow jackets that took up their abode in a small stump hole. The opening in the floor board had funneled those mean little guys right into the cab.

I plugged the floor board hole, climbed behind the wheel and proceeded to get out of there. By now those folks had been gone for over a half hour. Sure hoped they didn't leave the country with my new battery.

I swatted and shooed yellow jackets all along the way and blame near cleared them out, and never got stung once. The good folks were parked at Wickiup and getting set up. Again I greeted the two people and by now they were overjoyed. I switched batteries again and she tried the starter. The motor responded and everyone was really happy. They told me that I had been a lifesaver.

With my batter replaced and the motor running, the elderly couple came toward me to shake hands and bid me fair ado. The woman had an open purse in one hand and some money in the other and wanted to pay me for what I had done. I casually told them there was no charge and I wouldn't take their money.

I went on to explain that I was being paid for my time and that to help them out was one of my greatest pleasures. She wrote down my name and the name of the Forest Supervisor. Said she was going to make sure I got some recognition for the good deed. (Sure enough, about two weeks later I got a telephone call from the Supervisor and the guy really gave me a pat on the back. Later on, a big write up appeared about it in the Forest News.)

I drove back to Lodgepole and was greeted by an excited family. My boss had called and wanted me to stay by the phone. He might have another fire to go run down. The old boy never kicked about me running off to help those old folks out. In fact he said that is what the Forest Service is all about.

Boy is it ever a strain on a feller, waiting for the telephone to ring and start talking about a fire. After a couple more cups of coffee that tension was almost too much to bear, so I called headquarters to see what was going on and let my boss know I was ready, willing and able to head out anywhere at anytime. Boy was I ever chomping at the bit. (Later I wished I had kept my mouth shut.)

That year we had new men on Blue Rock and Bessie Rock Lookouts. Rustler Peak and Devil's Peak were manned by the same ones as last year.

The man on Bessie Rock was really jumpy. He was scared a fire would pop up and he would miss it. The man was out on the catwalk peering through his 8 power field glasses, looking at the countryside for miles beyond his area of responsibility. Actually if a lookout could see a fire 15 miles away and make an accurate shot on a fire, that's all they were expected to do. Anything beyond that would amount to a cross shot or something.

Our new college man finally scored a hit. The distance airline was right at 14 miles or so. Boy did he get excited. Carefully the fire was plotted out and written up on a fire report form after a fashion. He was so excited his handwriting was barely legible. Finally the discovery was called in to the dispatcher. The azimuth was a few degrees east of due south. Distance 14 miles. Base of smoke sighted, yes, and drifting southeast. It appeared to be in heavy timber.

Rustler Peak could not see a thing except two or three long gray rock slides and a couple open glades. But South Fork of The Rogue Canyon had a blind spot for a mile or so to Rustler Peak.

My boss called me back. Said it would be a good idea to head for the South Fork Trail head. He would have more orders at that time and for me to call when I arrived.

There were two things I didn't like about the whole thing. It was a little after 3 p.m., and I'd bet a ten dollar bill it wasn't a fire at all. But I had hired out to be tough, so away I went, headed for a new adventure.

It never took me long to get there. What I did was put on my fire pack, grab the radio, and head out up the trail. I turned the set on for Rustler Peak in case they should start talking. My boss had to call there to reach me.

I saw the one mile sign and kept going. Soon Rustler Peak responded to a call from headquarters. I waited until their broadcast was over and hollered them up. They were expecting my call.

My instructions were to go to the two mile sign and head out on an east course at 110°. Go one mile and there should be smoke. I hoped they were right.

Never once did anyone suspicion that the two mile sign on the South Fork Trail was about 100 yards away from me at the time.

Once there, my compass was set on 110°, and away I went, counting paces. It looked like the route was going to be a bearcat for the first quarter mile.

I was right. At least it was still daylight. There was a swampy area directly in my path. Yew wood grew thick but the stems were small. Boy was that a task to work and edge through that mess. The long, slender yew wood was impossible to break. It was springy and sometimes would sling-shot me backwards if I wasn't careful. There was no way around it, so the offset method was out.

About three quarters of the way across this sopping wet area, one of the unbreakable stems caught on my fire pack and down I went. My compass was in my right hand. My arm went back to break my fall and rammed it in the gooey mud, clear to my elbow. Hoped my compass was waterproof and unbreakable.

I propped myself up on a light-colored, smooth round rock, pulled my arm free, and wiped the smelly gooey mess off it and the compass. What a revolting development! Thank goodness my compass still worked. I continued on. Soon the going got pretty good. Just open stretches of dirt in between numerous rock piles and lava dikes, all gray in color.

I called Rustler Peak and told them the story. My boss said to keep looking. Well, I did. At the top end of long lava flow it seemed to me it was time to eat a bite. I could see Bessie Rock from there and knew I was sitting on the upper end of the smoke he saw. How disgusting! Another false smoke.

I was up fairly high and could see where the trail passed through the timber. If I took a different course it would be a snap to bypass that horrible swampy area.

I called Rustler Peak and told them there was nothing. My orders were to hang around until about dark and come on in. Well, phooey on that old noise. I picked up my fire pack and headed out. There was still a lot of daylight to travel in.

In half an hour the trail showed up. The one mile sign wasn't far away. In another half hour my car was sighted between the trees and that was exactly where I stayed until almost dark.

My car radio came in handy. There was a good country western station on and a weather forecast that sounded like foul weather coming up for the next couple of days.

Just before dark Rustler Peak was informed that there was absolutely no forest fire raging up through the timber like Bessie Rock said. My instructions were to depart and return to my car. Call them again as soon as I arrived and be careful on my way out.

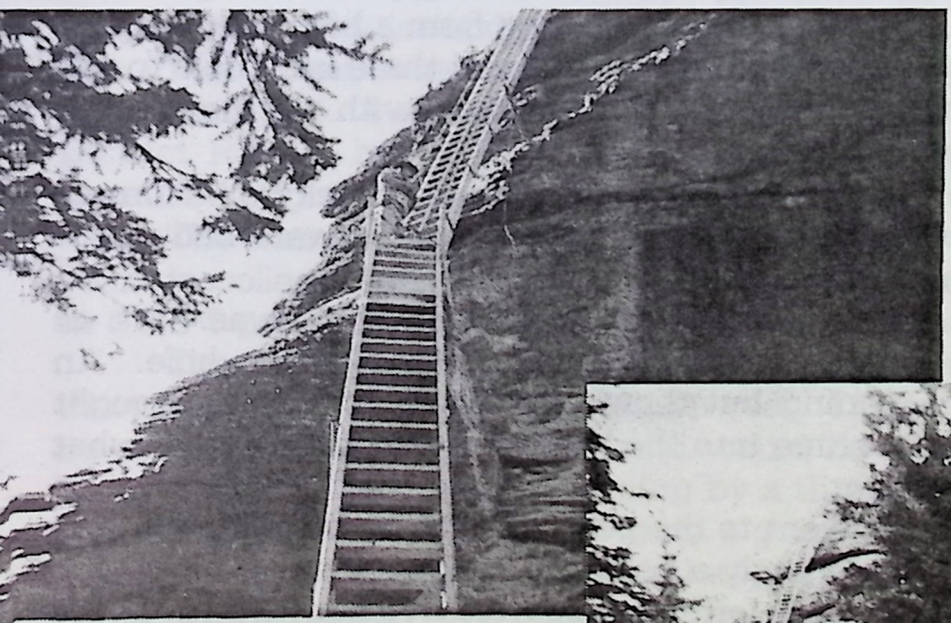
Well, they didn't know it but I was already there. For the next hour it felt good to sit and relax, listen to cowboy music and munch on an apple or two.

When I first started working for the Forest Service, I got acquainted with a man who really knew the ropes. We had worked together a lot, and he told me things to do and what to watch out for. If I sorted things out and used common sense, many times I could save myself a lot of trouble and unnecessary work. Well, this was one of those times he said would probably happen.

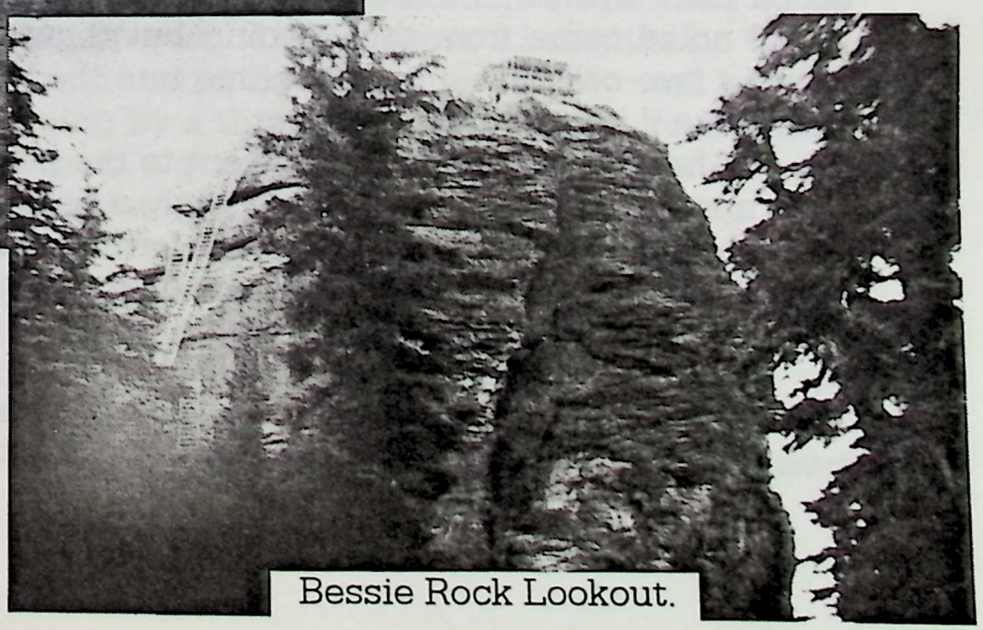
Another bit of good advice, every time I was around a fire pump, either one mounted on a truck or the smallest stationary model, I should learn how to operate every one. That kind of know-how would sure come in handy somewhere along the line. (My friend was right. It sure enough did.)

At about the right time I should get to my car according to them, I called in. Rustler Peak was starting to get worried. The message was, head for home and get some rest.

The next day there were a lot of questions asked and talking done. At least they believed my story because all the timber that was supposed to have burned up is still there to this day (1993). The Bessie Rock Lookout man had to further his education on fire detection, and we continued on into the summer months on the Butte Falls District. And I had one more false smoke behind me. But I reckon that was the name of the game.



What a climb!



Bessie Rock Lookout.

CHAPTER FOUR
HEMLOCK LAKE SMOKELESS FIRE

It seems like that living in a remote place like Lodgepole Guard Station would be lonely and boring. But in fact it was just exactly the opposite. Our children were learning something every minute of each day we were there.

Some of the most interesting events were when they discovered wildlife. One day the three little ones came running to the house, jabbering about something. I happened to be home at the time. They came crashing through the doorway, all three talking and pointing at once. Don stood between my knees, Janna and Tricia at each side.

I put my hands on the girls' shoulders and convinced them to let Don do the talking this time. They had been playing house out in the mule corral near one of the big fence posts at the south end. The posts were 15 to 20 feet inches in diameter and large poles were mortised in each side to form a three pole fence. It really worked dandy for a few years, but the wood soon rotted away and left a shell maybe two inches thick but the posts looked solid. The only reason they didn't fall over was because of the large diameter.

Anyhow, Don found a burlap drop chute (it was one I brought in from a fire, and it was used to drop fire tools and other smaller equipment into fires. When the burlap parachute opened up it was 13 feet across.)

One corner of the chute was being nailed to the big post. Don pounded a nail into the post, and a funny noise started coming from a hole near the top. The youngins weren't tall enough to look into the round three inch hole to see what was going on. Every time they tapped the post with the hammer it sounded to them like it was a bee's nest.

Bea and I were quite concerned at first because the Black Bald Hornets were apt to build a nest in places like that. Yellow Jackets were bad about taking up their abode in empty holes, too.

First I walked up on the side of the post where the hole was. We all stood back aways. I tossed a small rock and hit the post near the hole. An awful noise came from the opening but there were no bees. I had brought along a two-celled flashlight to shine into the hollowed out post and see what was there if hornets didn't appear.

After a couple more hits I went to the post and shined the light into the dark opening. What I saw was certainly a beautiful thing to see.

Nestled in the bottom of a well-formed nest were five baby birds. Every time I tapped the post their beaks opened wide like five different funnels. They were fast growing hungry little birds.

I reached inside and carefully took hold of a couple quivering squawking babies and brought them up from their cozy home. My family could see what was making the noise. What an opportunity to show them first hand

something more about wildlife and how these babies live.

The children were wide-eyed and quite excited. They each got to hold one, and feel the tender little bodies in their hands and how fragile they were. Overhead in a Lodgepole Pine tree were two large birds, brownish yellow in color, making all kinds of noise and diving at us. They were the mom and dad of these tiny little bits of wildlife.

I replaced the little things to their nest and told everyone to follow me. We departed and went to sit beneath some shade trees up in the yard to watch. Sure enough Mama bird landed on top of the post and looked around. Then she worked her way down to the hole and disappeared. She must have been counting her little ones.

As we watched both parents flew back and forth to the nest, each one carrying a bug or grasshopper to feed those hungry youngins.

What a wonderful way to teach my own little ones a wildlife lesson. I told them we "should never try to capture or take a baby animal or bird home with us and try to teach them to be a pet. It would be exactly the same thing if someone came and took one of you away from your home."

"The little animal or bird would probably die of starvation or thirst because only their parents know what they eat and how to feed them. If someone took you away, it could be that the same thing might happen to you."

"That hole in the post is their home...Mom and Dad birds raising their babies. Soon they, too, will fly out into the wilds and make a home somewhere and raise some more baby birds."

Right then, when my story was really getting interesting, the telephone started ringing. I dashed in to see who was calling. It happened to be the District Ranger himself. He was just checking to make sure I was handy because I might be sent out on another fire. Boy was I ever ready to go.

The man on Blue Rock was new. He was a man who had spent four years in college, trying to learn how to be a forester. He came to the District as a GS-5 grade, which is rather low for an educated feller.

The way I understand Government procedure, such a man had to go through what they called a probation year. During those 12 months he would be exposed to a variety of jobs and would be graded as to how well he took hold. This man was sort of hanging by a thread, because no one could find a place where he fit well enough to do a good job. So now the Ranger had put him on a lookout to see what would happen. Today he had spotted a fire.

Approximately 3½ miles up the Hemlock Lake Trail something was happening. I turned my radio on and listened in. The fire was on the side of the lower third of a long ridge. Boy was he ever excited! Said it was really burning hot, but would flare up then die down constantly. He went on to say that it was the strangest fire he had ever seen. It was all fire and no smoke.

The telephone to Blue Rock had been disconnected, but from

headquarters to my station it was still up and talking. So, the Ranger and I carried on a conversation while listening to the radios. I had copied down the township, range, section and subdivision. Also a location by landmark. I was ready to depart.

The poor guy was trying. But he just didn't know what he was talking about. If there was a fire on that slope, southwest, mostly south, it would really be going to town. I knew the country well, and with the amount of timber and dry underbrush, by now, a big column of smoke would be hundreds of feet high. But he continued to say, "There it is, real plain, now I can't see it!"

We pondered the problem back and forth. Finally the Ranger said, "I'll bet a plug nickel that what he sees is an orange parachute from a weather balloon." Said it must be hung up on a tree and wind currents are causing it to move behind something for a moment and then reappear. It seemed to me that it was a good summary of the Hemlock Lake Trail Fire.

The Ranger told me not to bother about running it down. Just stick around, just in case. But he was almost sure a weather balloon had burst high in the sky. When the unit came back to earth it was let down by a bright orange, almost red, parachute that the balloon was under. When the balloon burst at a certain altitude, the parachute let the weather broadcasting system back down easy instead of crashing to earth in a free fall.

As I remember what happened to our man on the lookout, he underwent some more training in fire detection as well as other duties that are performed by the Forest Service.

I do know one thing for sure. If the Ranger would have sent me to locate that smokeless fire, I would have brought back a weather radio and a big orange parachute. It might have taken awhile to chop the tree down, but that is exactly what I would have done.

Seems like no matter how much training and coaching someone goes through to learn how to accurately turn in a real fire, a new man or woman will get excited and turn in a false smoke. It's no fault of theirs, generally. They are so nervous and jumpy, they are scared not to plot out something that turns out to be a false smoke.

I got so I took everything into consideration. If a smoke really rolls up, nearly always there will be cross shots from other towers. But I do know one thing for sure. If I was sent out on a false smoke or a real live one, it was all a wonderful experience being a smoke chaser.

CHAPTER FIVE
FOG POCKET AT BESSIE SHELTER

During those early years when the US Forest Service was really a worthwhile outfit, there were so many things that were accomplished. I know from years of experience that numerous projects were started and finished, much of which were done before and after working hours. The reason this always happened was because of the love each man had for the outfit. To be able to finish one thing and proceed on to another was such a great challenge. Each job or project was accomplished by using plain old common sense. And the job was usually perfect.

Nowadays, any one of these projects would require months of planning and engineering. Even a landscape architect, a site planner, and who knows what other big gun would want to get in on the kill. After all, part of the allotted money should help pay their wages.

Years ago, a project took place at the edge of a beautiful little meadow by the Bessie Creek Trail. Bessie Creek itself flowed by within 20 feet of the site. A dandy, snow proof three-sided shelter was built.

My uncle, by the name of Clarence Wilhite, worked out of the Butte Falls Ranger District as a trail maintenance man every summer. One season after the trail work was finished, he and the Ranger met at this site and spent a day or two there. Plans were made to construct a shelter to be used as a base camp for trail maintenance men and could also be used by hunters, first come, first served.

Money was tight in those days, just like now, and more men couldn't be hired to accomplish this job. So the Ranger asked my uncle if he would like to tackle such a project alone. Of course the answer was yes. It looked like a dandy excuse to spend more time in the high country. Besides, he could catch fish for breakfast every single day if he wished.

In a couple days a two mule pack string hauled in some supplies, including camp gear, nails and various other articles. But there was only one hammer, one saw and a warped square.

Here was one of those projects that got done by my uncle, working early and late, weekends and all, because he loved the assignment he had and could hardly wait until it was finished. All this took place during the year of 1940, and the shelter still stands to this day, 1993.

It was at this site where I spent the night during early summer of 1954. My boss and I were on the last legs of a three day back country trip. We had ridden up from McKie that morning. When we topped the ridge heading along the Tom and Jerry Trail, on a high point it seemed like a good place to check in and tell of our whereabouts and see what was happening. The moment our radio was turned on, the last part of a message sounded like bad

news. As we listened, we learned that the man on Bessie Rock had come down with an appendicitis attack. The boss called headquarters. Our lookout was one sick feller.

Airline, it was maybe six miles to the station. By horseback it was at least 12 miles. We headed out. Meanwhile a logging crew was sent in to assist. The poor guy had to be brought down 110 feet from the floor of the lookout and carried out three miles to an ambulance. We all arrived at the base of the rock about the same time.

My boss took over and I headed back to Bessie Shelter to look after the stock and spend the night there. Even though this was my fourth night to stay out here in the wilderness, I loved it. The two saddle horses and two mules were contentedly grazing in a grass-covered meadow close by. I counted five limit-sized trout in a pool by the shelter. Two of them were ten inches or better in size.

It looked like rain. Plenty of wood was rounded up and a fire started in a big rock fireplace. The rocks formed a ring maybe three feet across with a grate over the top.

I called the boss who was playing lookout that night. Said there were thunderheads building to the south and southeast. A few were rolling in from the southwest. We might get some lightning tonight.

After a hearty supper I checked the critters one more time and prepared my sleeping bag for a good night's rest. An air mattress, pillow and an extra cover would do the trick.

Boy, did it ever rain during the night. Lots of thunder and lightning flashes occurred about 2:30 in the morning and clattered around until about daylight.

I was up and at 'em shortly thereafter. Boy, did a big fire feel good, once I got it to going. I never bothered to check in until around 8:00 a.m.. Breakfast tasted mighty good. There were three medium-sized boiled potatoes left over from supper. By peeling and dicing them up my frying pan looked almost full. For flavor, one small onion was sliced up real fine. When everything was a golden brown, three eggs were broken and added to the potatoes and onion. In a couple minutes, there before my eyes was a rib-sticking meal!

I called Bessie Rock. There was one excited man who answered. Right after sunup he had spotted a fire. It was almost due east of the shelter, about ¾ of a mile away.

I went to my saddle bags and got a fire report form and copied down all the information. There was no column of smoke, just a big white grayish-looking puff about every five minutes that would raise up through the tree tops.

I saddled up and rode out in that direction but didn't bother to take any fire tools. I just couldn't believe there was much of a fire where he said because there was a lot of water came down out of that thunderhead. If so, it

wouldn't go anywhere in that water-soaked brush.

Me and my mount went up the Tom and Jerry Trail about ¾ of a mile. By now, most of the fog pockets were gone and the sun shined down real hot.

I rode out through the open timber and came to a dome-shaped hill or knob. From there was a clear shot to Bessie Rock.

My radio was in my saddle bags. I turned it on and told my boss he would get a mirror flash from where I was. I used a mirror about two inches square and sighted him in, using a tree top. By holding the reflection of the sunlight at the top, with the lookout directly in line, I just about blinded him, he told me later.

From where I sat on my horse, the fire was south of me about a hundred yards. It was in a shallow draw with tall timber all around. By staying in the open timber I got over on the other side of the brush-filled opening. The sun was really beating down hot. I watched in amazement at something going on I had never seen before or since.

Every leaf on the brush of several species was either full or coated with water. The sun was so hot that steam or fog pockets would accumulate and rise from the brush field, all at once. Sure enough, anywhere between three and five minutes, a huge puff of vapor would raise straight up through the tree tops and disappear.

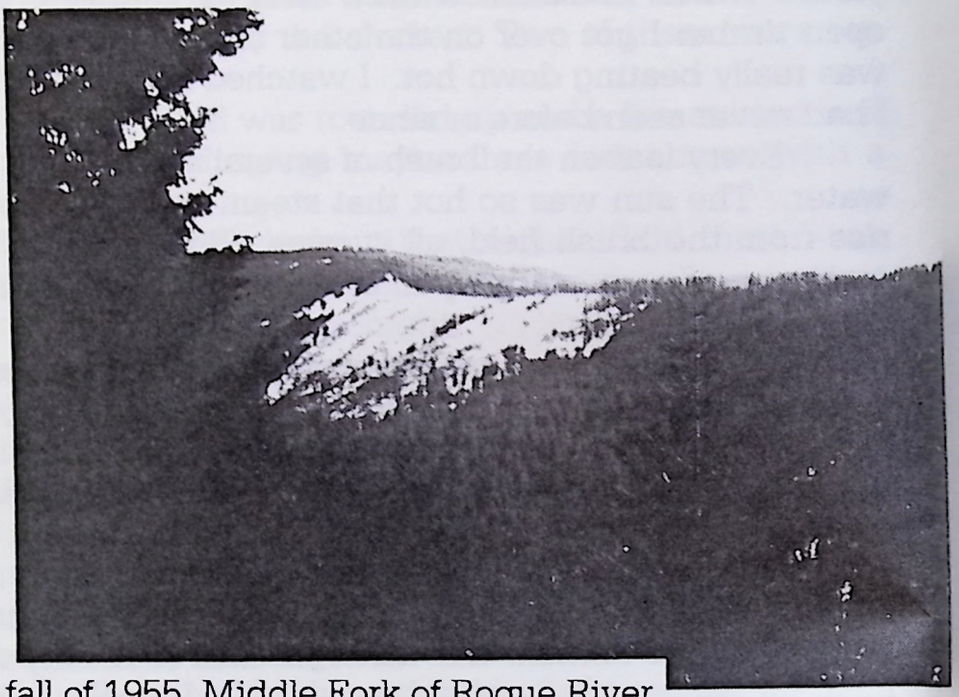
I told the boss what was going on and even flashed him with my mirror three more times from different angles. Sure enough, I had been dispatched to another false smoke. But at least I learned something every single time. It never paid to get excited, even on a real forest fire. It just didn't pay to get in a hurry.

From the time I saw the fog pocket to when my boss and I headed for home sweet home, around 1:30 p.m., there were no more incidents. From Bessie Rock to Imnaha was an eight mile ride. My wife and youngins would meet me there and we would return to Lodgepole.

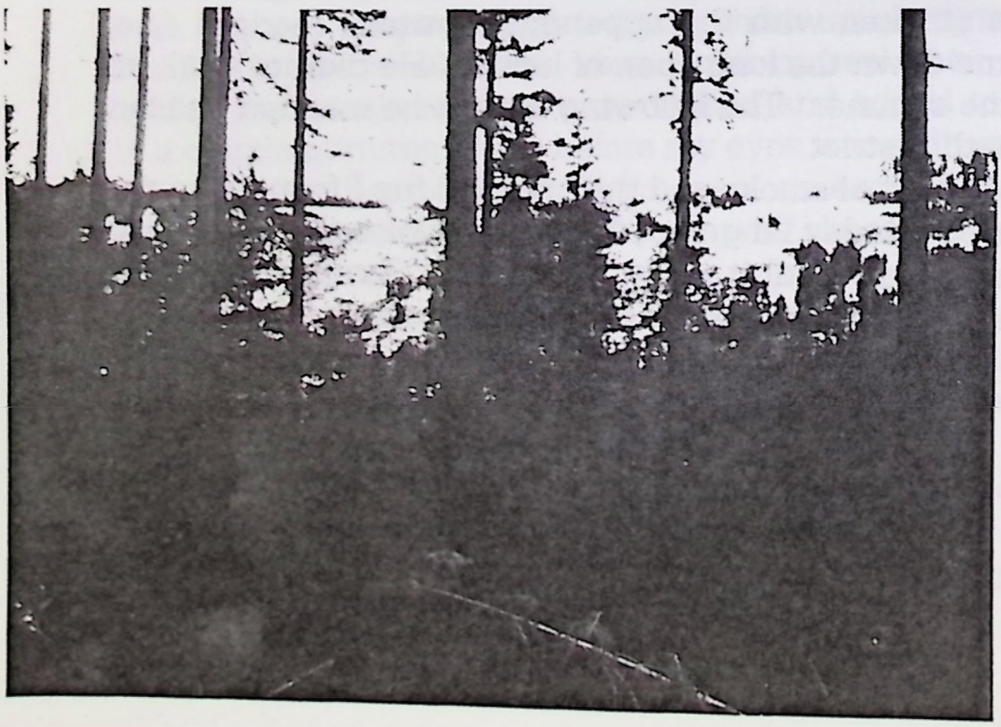
The man who was stricken with the appendicitis attack made it fine. But it did burst as he came down the long span of ladder. He did not work on the forest for the rest of the summer. The following season he manned Pelican Butte Tower on the Klamath District.

By now I had chased a lot of smoke and the only real fire I found was the test fire on Fry Creek. But, someday I'd get my chance because the odds were on my side. I could hardly wait until it really happened. Surely a lightning storm would come over soon and set something on fire in my area.

Devil's Peak Lookout



Fire burned in fall of 1955, Middle Fork of Rogue River.



CHAPTER SIX
IMNAHA CREEK FIRE --- FOR REAL

By now I had run the pack string and chased smoke out of Lodgepole for three years. So far, every single run the dispatcher sent me on turned out to be either fog pockets, rock slides or some other fool thing. On one occasion my boss almost had me spend the night and look some more the next day. And all the time I knew it was nothing but the imagination working overtime.

Finally, one day in middle September, we got word from the weather bureau that we could expect a 60 percent chance of lightning that day. When I heard the news, it really didn't mean too much. It had been predicted more of a percentage than that and nothing ever really happened in my area. All the other smoke chasers got all the good ones. I had to stick around at Lodgepole and be on standby.

But, sure enough, the 60 percent prediction came true about three o'clock. I crossed my fingers and hoped for the best. I wanted to chase smoke on a real fire, just once, at least.

Rustler Peak was really keeping an eye on things. So were Bessie Rock, Blue Rock, and Devil's Peak. Any one of them would be able to spot a fire in my area of responsibility except Devil's Peak. The storm that moved in was really doing some banging around.

Suddenly there was a long, dog-leg shaped bolt of lightning struck something toward Imnaha. But it was right at dusk and Rustler Peak wasn't able to get a good fix on it.

At first, he put the strike on Spring Creek, about ¼ mile east of the Parker Meadows Road. Boy was I ever listening in on the telephone as well as the radio. From information gathered it was exciting to keep notes on what the lookouts saw before I got called to take a fire report.

Just before visibility faded away completely the man on Rustler Peak got one more look at what he figured was a smoke. It was somewhere between Spring Creek and Imnaha.

My boss called me and told the whole story. There was a real fire out there somewhere. The entire country between Lodgepole and Imnaha was heavily timbered. Old growth timber still survived in abundance, mostly because the stands hadn't caught on fire and burned.

It was way after dark now, around eight o'clock. He wanted me to drive to the vicinity and spend time sniffing the area for smoke. There could be smoke drifting down the numerous draws and canyons in the still evening air. Usually air currents went up places like that in the morning as the day started to warm up. In cool evenings like this, the warm air would rise or drift up and be replaced as the temperature got lower, by cooler air.

I drove to Spring Creek and parked my car in a wide place near the

small bridge. Boy was it ever dark and quiet. The huge Doug Fir and Pine trees were so tall, the canopy so thick it obscured the sky. The light from my flashlight literally cut a hole through the black night.

Knee high vegetation grew thick under foot. Such things as Thimble berries with the broad green leaves and numerous other species grew thick because of the damp, shaded environment. The bright light from my flashlight couldn't reach the ground, just reflect off the shrubbery.

I headed up a wide flat area that led away from the creek. About a hundred yards or so there was a weird noise that started near my feet and zigzagged back and forth uphill away from me. An animal was moving around through the thick undergrowth to get away from its intruder.

My light only reflected off the green leaves above the noise, but I kept looking. Soon the noise quit and the critter emerged in a small opening and stopped. It was a big porcupine. Slowly he turned his head. First, one eye reflected in the light, then the other. Both eyes didn't shine the same because their eyes are on the side of their heads more than a deer or dog's eyes are.

We watched each other for a moment and went our separate ways. The scraping, shuffling noise was caused by the animal's long quills rubbing along on the dense foliage.

Believe me, I cradled my compass in my hand to make sure my route of travel didn't go in circles, because right now, everything looked the same. But there was still no sign of smoke. Boy was it ever quiet. Sort of spooky.

Well, I had been staying on a course of 60°, more or less, and had walked for half a mile or better. My return azimuth would be around 240°. It would at least put me back on the road.

When I turned back I heard another noise that sort of made the adrenalin flow. High in a tree top was a Great Horned Owl. In less that half a minute, another one answered who was about a hundred yards away in another tall tree. His voice sounded different. They had finally responded to a strange disturbance in their hunting grounds. The rascals followed me as I stumbled along.

I often wondered what they were thinking. Were they trying to figure out if I was worth trying to capture and carry back to their nest? Or were they attempting to scare me away so I would quit spoiling their nighttime hunting? Nevertheless, after the first shock of fright, they were welcome companions as I meandered along.

If at first I thought the quietness of the dense forest was natural, on my return trip it was not true any more. Every animal in the near vicinity came to check me out. Before my feet touched solid ground again, I had jumped at least six head of deer, those two owls, and a couple other critters that never got in the beam of my flashlight. I was so excited about the whole thing, I nearly forgot what I was out there for. I did not smell any smoke.

My car was in sight. It was easy to find because after I got back to the

live, swift-running stream, the sound of the water led me back to my point of departure. I called Rustler Peak and told them what was going on. I was to return to my station, get some rest, and wait for further instructions at daybreak.

By now I was so full of energy and wanting something to happen so bad I could hardly stand it. Guess sleep caught up with me for a short time, but come daylight, me and the telephone were facing each other while I wolfed down some breakfast.

The dispatcher called me about an hour after daylight. Fog pockets were scattered all over the district. But, soon, there it was for sure. A dark-colored column of smoke raised up through the tree tops.

I liked to fell out of my chair when the phone rang. The dispatcher didn't give me a legal description of the fire yet, because no one was really sure. It was in a broad canyon. Neither Rustler Peak nor Bessie Rock could get a fix on it. For now, it looked like it was just northwest of the Imnaha Guard Station.

The dispatcher decided that I should head out toward Imnaha and drive up an obscure road until I came to the start of the Alta Lake Trail. I was to go up the trail to the one mile sign and go uphill until the country south of there was visible.

The miles to Alta Lake started at the corral gate at Imnaha. My car made it to within a hundred yards of the one mile sign. Boy, was this going to be a challenge. Brush and small trees were tall and thicker than the hair on a dog's back. And they expected me to fight the elements and try to locate my fire.

There were times when the ground was five or six feet beneath me as I climbed, fought and pushed my way toward the ridge top. But up ahead was a single Doug Fir tree, maybe 2½ feet in diameter. Boy, this could save me a lot of trouble if only the limbs were big enough to hold my weight. The tree was only a hundred feet further uphill, but it took almost a half hour to get there.

Sure enough. This loner was called a wolf tree, because green sturdy limbs grew clear from the ground. It seemed kinda nice to leave that awful brush field as I climbed higher in the tree. About twenty feet above ground my view was excellent. Rustler Peak was in plain sight and I flashed him with my mirror until he shot back. But outside of that, there was no visible smoke anywhere. What a bummer.

My trip back down the brush-shrouded hill wasn't nearly as hard as going up. I drove to Imnaha and checked in. Also, I called home to let my family in on what was happening.

By now, our third year at Lodgepole, there were two more little Walkers added to the fold. Our little girl, Leslie, and a baby boy named Tracy. What a wonderful place to raise my family.

The dispatcher had finally plotted out another route of travel. The fire was now confirmed by three cross shots, Rustler Peak, Bessie Rock, and Blue Rock. It was determined that the blaze was east of southeast from Imnaha house.

My route of travel was to follow the drainage up past the springs and continue on an easterly course, bearing a little to the south. I was to carry my 45 pound fire pack and radio. The going should be in open timber, mostly old growth.

I lined out on my route of travel hoping for the best. Sure enough, the going was real good except a couple brush fields covered with slick leaf and vine maple.

An hour went by. No fire, nor was there any smoke. Could this be somebody's idea of a joke? I dumped the heavy fire pack and sat on it. With my radio switch turned on there was no one talking. I picked up the mike and started to press the button. Suddenly there was a thunderous crash up the draw about a hundred feet away. A huge limb about 20 inches in diameter had fallen from near the top of a massive Douglas Fir tree. It had burned off finally, and came crashing down, smoke, sparks, and fire flying all over the place. Man, what a shock!

The ground was damp, so was the vegetation under foot. It would not get a run on me. I called in and told all about my find. This was my first real fire!

First I sized the situation up so there would be something to talk about. The tree was almost eight foot in diameter, breast high. Many years ago the top had been broken off and three different limbs had grown straight up to form many tops. The one that had burned off and fallen was the biggest one.

There was a lot of fire crackling away in the top ¼ of the big tree. It would take a couple experienced timber fallers to lay it down safely. By the looks of it, I was sure it would no doubt be full of liquid pitch in the lower part of the stem. The wood separates and spreads apart, usually in about four different places. The cracks are wide at ground level and taper off at 30 or 40 feet up. These wide separations, or long pockets, hold gallons of pitch. This is caused largely by wind shake, or as the wind makes the tree sway back and forth. I would say this tree was between 500 and 700 years old or more. It would be no surprise to me if there were 50 or 100 gallons of the gooey, sticky pitch bottled up in the tree.

During the years I fell and bucked timber for a living, many of the big trees we laid down were full of liquid pitch that ran from the saw cuts like cold sorghum. It was mighty miserable pulling an eight foot long cross cut saw back and forth. We used kerosene to cut the stickiness.

I called Rustler Peak and advised them what I would need in the way of manpower. It would take two timber fallers with a long bar chain saw. They should send in three more men to help mop this thing up once it came down.

because the moment it hit the ground the top half would no doubt shatter. It was full of fire. It would be a blazing inferno for awhile.

By the time all these people arrived at the take-off sight I would have a plainly marked trail from there to the fire. The distance was maybe one and a half miles.

It took awhile to round these people up, but within two hours from the time they were requested, they arrived at their point of take-off. From there is was all good going to the fire the way I routed them in. I was waiting for them at the fire...my first real fire in three years.

The first thing the timber fallers did was throw dirt around the base of the tree where hot coals had picked up. One man sized the tree up to determine direction of fall. There was still a few chunks of burning debris coming down from right overhead, but not near as bad as an hour ago.

It took three men to, in effect, cut the tree down. One man did the cutting while another fellow stood right beside him. He kept his eye on a man who never took his eyes from the burning tree top. The second something broke loose and started to fall, he gave the guard a quick signal. He, in turn, would touch the faller's arm and they were out of there.

This procedure occurred six different times before I saw the huge tree start to tip. Slowly the back cut started to open up. Liquid pitch was flowing out. The tree thundered to the ground. The top two thirds of it literally exploded in flame and smoke. Amber-colored pitch drained from the butt cut and flowed every direction, filling all the depressions and low places level full. Some of these were eight to ten inches deep. It was tough getting around and also quite a task to keep the flammable substance from igniting.

We fought fire pretty hard for an hour or more. The timber cutters sawed a couple blocks of wood from the center. A line was completed and mop up was done by dark. Six men had done battle to the fire. It would soon dry up around the area and the Imnaha guard would check it out every day for awhile to be sure it wouldn't kindle itself to life.

Chasing smoke sort of gets in a feller's blood, I found out. The last spark on this one was hardly dead yet, and I was ready, mighty willing, and able to line out, looking for another fire. In fact, there was something about going to a forest fire that got to be a truly special thing for me. If there was a fire somewhere on the district or the forest, it really got to me if I didn't get to go. But many a time they kept me on standby at Lodgepole, in case another one took off. Of course my wife and five youngins were always glad when times like this occurred. We always had lots of fun together at our wilderness home.

Imnaha house.

Imnaha barn.

Livestock loaded,
heading for another trip.

CHAPTER SEVEN
HOUR GLASS FIRE ON SUMPTER CREEK

So many things at Lodgepole Guard Station were fairly routine, but everyday was a brand new challenge.

I made a good many pack trips, cargoing equipment and supplies to fire lookouts, two different trail crews, recreation crews, and any other outfit who needed supplies in wilderness country. Of course I had my fair share of fires to pack in to and out of, all summer long.

Lightning was always our greatest kindler of forest fires back then. And it was truly an exciting time for the Walkers when one started pounding the tar out of things around our station.

One day the lightning prediction was fairly high and most smoke chasers were hoping for a chance to line out on a new adventure. Thunder and lightning could be seen and heard from two lookouts, Robinson Butte and Rustler Peak. The storm was fairly intense and was headed our way. The clouds were dark and appeared to be full of water.

The moment we heard a clatter of thunder, all the Walkers would get set. Springless mattresses were spread out on the floor, the telephone disconnected and all doors and windows were closed. Lightning has been known to follow air currents. Soon the wind started blowing. Horses and mules were racing across the pasture, back and forth, as hard as their legs could carry them. It seemed funny, but every single time, the mules outran the horses.

Suddenly there was a crash of thunder, seconds after we saw a sky-lightning flash. That strike was only about ¼ mile away. It started to hail. Boy did it ever roar off the house roof!

Believe me, all five of the children were awake and wide-eyed. We looked out toward the barn. All the stock were standing inside, under cover, except Dillon mule. He squared off with his rump to the wind under a bushy Lodgepole Pine tree, flopping his long ears around.

Small, marble-sized hail hit the barn roof and rolled to the ground, forming wind rows of the white, cold ice under the eaves. That gave me an idea.

That year a friend of ours had loaned us a couple milk goats. We had all the milk that seven people could possibly use, and some to spare. I don't know where the two nannies were when the hail struck, but we knew they were probably safely snuggled up beneath some heavy brush and trees, blinking their eyes.

The youngins seemed to be getting somewhat worried, and their mother had an anxious look on her face. It was up to me now. Seemed like a good time to tell them about a surprise I had in mind. I knelt down on a mattress

between them and asked, "How would everyone like to have some ice cream?"

They nearly forgot about the storm. Sure it would be nice, but where was their favorite dessert?

I told them that if we all worked together we would be eating ice cream within a half hour after the storm passed over. Everybody was all ears. Here was my plan.

Bea, their mother, would go to the kitchen and start stirring up the ice cream mix. Don would run down to the horse trough and get the wooden ice cream bucket. (We kept it submerged in water so it wouldn't dry out and fall apart)

Tricia was to get two dishpans, and Janna and Leslie were to go with her and start filling the pans with hail. Tracy would stay inside and watch.

The storm faded away to the northwest and was gone nearly as fast as it started. The sun came out and steam was rising from the building roofs and old Dillon's back. I gave the signal and everyone headed out.

In nothing flat, here came Don with the bucket and he raced out to help the girls. Soon, here they were; two dishpans heaped up with hail were placed on the back porch. Everyone was really excited.

I put the gallon metal container down inside the wooden bucket, fit the geared handle to the top and started turning the crank. Don was there with a sack of rock salt. The girls proceeded to put hail in around the freezing part with tin cups. I would tell Don when to add salt.

Soon, it was heaped up over the lid as I continued to turn the crank. Inside the metal container are two long hard wooden paddles that revolve counter-clockwise. The metal bucket turns clockwise. The cold ice between the wooden bucket and the ice cream container causes the mix to freeze quickly.

The idea of using a certain amount of salt causes the ice to melt just enough so it slips past the metal and is more condensed. Here came Mama with a big pitcher filled with mix. I took the gear box off, cleared the lid of hail, took it off, and she poured the batter to within two inches of the top. I replaced the lid and handle mechanism and started turning the crank. Don put more hail on top but no salt above the lid.

The girls were huddled around one of the dishpans talking real serious about something. Tricia had noticed all the black things mixed in with the hail and didn't know what it was. Who ever saw black hail? Between them and Don it was determined that the black hail was goat poop. So they were picking it out and tossing it on the ground. She figured it might cause the ice cream to taste bad. Bea carefully explained that the ice didn't get in the ice cream, just on the outside, so the black pellets couldn't get near the ice cream itself.

Soon the handle on the churn started turning hard. The youngins took

turns sitting on top of the freezer after their mother placed an old coat over the cold metal. Each one took a whack at the crank to see how it felt. A few more turns and it was ready to eat.

I pulled the handle off and lifted the metal bucket from the ice. Their mother wiped the moisture off with an old towel and we proceeded to the kitchen table. I lifted the lid off and there was our handy work.

All this fun was fairly new to the little Walkers. We drew straws to see who got to lick the paddles. Leslie was the winner. In just exactly a half hour after I said, "Go!", we were all sitting around the kitchen table enjoying the fruits of our labor. What a fun thing to do!

Then I remembered our telephone wasn't hooked up. I dashed out, threw the switch, came back in and called headquarters. No one had been trying to call. But Rustler Peak had picked up a smoke on Sumpter Creek.

A column of smoke came up high enough to get a good fix on it. About that time another cloud moved over and put down a lot of water for over half an hour. Apparently the fire had been rained out. Just my luck. That one would have been mine.

The next day was a dandy. I kept making drags with my pack string. This time of year I was in the saddle seven days a week at all hours of the day and night. Forest fires don't wait on anything or anyone. And the lookouts on the high mountain peaks and rock pinnacles had to eat and get their mail.

Rarely did I ever pull out from Lodgepole with less than two mule loads, and many a time there were four or five head, packing from 160 to 180 pounds each.

My shortest trips were 26 miles and they took around 14 hours to make. That was to Devil's Peak and Bessie Rock. I only got paid for eight of those hours, but I could have cared less, because I was doing something that many a good man longed to do, but didn't know how.

I do not believe that all my overtime hours were appreciated or even noticed for that matter. And when I tell about how it was back then, no one, except my family and friends, believe me. But what I tell here and in a dozen other books I've written are all true stories, and are not my imagination working overtime.

For the next three weeks there were fires on the forest in various places, man-caused or by lightning. We had one firebug on the loose going along a back country road. Nothing got very bad.

Rustler Peak kept an eye on the Sumpter Creek strike. It was a mighty hot fire for a short period of time before it got rained down. But the weather had been quite hot and the humidity down around 10 to 14 or less in certain areas.

Finally, at about three o'clock one hot afternoon, up it came. A long slender column of smoke rose up above the tree tops and bent toward the northwest. That meant we had a southeast wind fanning it up. He plotted it

out, and it was the same location where the strike was 18 days before. Sleepers like this were not uncommon, but during my 31 years with the U. S. Forest Service, that one stayed down the longest.

It happened to be on a Saturday afternoon. For a wonder, I was at my station resting up after being out all day Friday and half of the last night. The phone rang. It was my boss with a fire report. I filled in the blank places and waited for further orders.

I would drive to the Parker Meadows road and wait there for a man by the name of Claude Curtis. He would catch up with me on the hill just above Sumpter Creek.

The azimuth to the fire was given to me in three different tangents. The first run was 40° for one mile. At that point we would set our compass to 30° and follow the azimuth, mile number two. The last tangent would be a due north shot that would take us right to the fire.

The smoke was really rolling up. It was in tall timber. A couple smoke jumpers were dispatched to the fire and we would take over once we got there.

Claude came rambling in about four o'clock. I opened our fireman's map and spread it out on an old tree stump. By using a protractor our route was traced out. We were ready to hit the brush and maybe get there before dark.

The first mile was real good going. There was a lot of vine maple that sprawled out all over the place, but all we had to do was step over the springy stems without too much trouble.

Claude and I were each carrying a 45 pound fire pack, and I had a ten pound radio. He wanted me to be the compass man much to my delight. We were walking together ten or twelve feet apart.

Ahead of me was a vine maple with stems at least four inches in diameter at the ground end. The two biggest parts sprawled out in different directions for several feet and the leafy foliage turned upward to form a brushy area. I stepped over between the two stems and bumped against one with my boot heel. From the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of a long gray football-sized Bald Hornet's nest. It swayed back and forth and up and down. The big black fellers started coming out from the hole, looking for their tormentor. Claude and I saw it about the same time.

Well, from then on we lined out as fast as we could run. A couple or three buzzed us, but never made contact. Claude and I ran hard for more than a hundred yards, then sat down for a rest. The fast spurt caused me to lose track of my paces, but we estimated that it was a mile from where we sat to our cars at Parker Meadows Road.

With the map spread out on the ground we looked it over and planned our next route of travel. At a 30° tangent we would be following a long ridge, more or less, for maybe half a mile. The timber was huge. Most stems were

from four to six foot in diameter. There were several different species, but Douglas Fir seemed to be the dominant ones.

Soon we approached an area where there was a lot windfall. There were big trees laying every which way. Some were stacked three high. It really made it rough going. We had to rest often.

The sky was becoming overcast. It may start raining again any time. I called Rustler Peak and told them the story. The dispatcher said if the going got too rough not to try and keep going after darkness settled in.

Finally the ridge we were on made a slight turn. Our 30° course fell right across a narrow, steep canyon. The timber lay thick across from one side to the other. There was a live stream running somewhere down there, no doubt a tributary of Sumpter Creek.

Again I called in and let them know what was going on. It would soon be too dark to take a chance. We should prepare to spend the night. There was a little daylight left to gather firewood and pick a safe place to hole up.

Nearby, a big Doug Fir tree had been blown over. This species is a shallow-rooted tree. The tree trunk was over six feet in diameter. When the tree fell it pulled up a tremendous amount of dirt and pumice rock. It reminded me of a giant fan standing on the flat side. There was a long, six foot wide hole where the base of the tree stood. And the root fan was 12 feet high at the center. From one end to the other was nearly 20 feet. The old tree had a good root system except for one thing. They all grew almost on top of the ground.

Claude and I decided this would be an ideal campsite. We took a couple long limbs and knocked all the exposed loose rocks and gobs of dirt from the fan. Then with our fire shovels the hole was cleaned out, flattened at each end, and we created ourselves a dandy fireplace to camp by. The big root system would reflect heat back on us in case the weather turned sour.

Claude was a tall big man who was over 200 pounds of muscle. He was an old Arkansas hillbilly just like me. Only I was, and still am, an Oregon mountain man. We both loved what we were doing and planned to make the most of it.

He started a dandy cooking fire at the center of the bottom of the hole. We dug out a place to sit at each end. I found a couple chunks of dry bark to use as cushions. Also, while looking around, it only seemed natural to cut a couple long forked sticks to toast some of our food with.

While our cooking fire was burning down to form a bed of hot coals, I fashioned myself a bed. At the top of the hole over to one side I dug a long bench-like place over three feet wide. The surface was molded and fashioned to fit the contour of my body while laying on my back. Then I found a piece of White Fir bark that was half rotten and flimsy on an old downed snag that had fallen. It was spread out lengthwise along my bed. I tried it out, and boy was it ever comfortable.

Claude had started to warm up his supper. It was really dark by now and we were two happy-go-lucky men. I saw him open a can of beef patties and poured them out on a chunk of aluminum foil about 14 inches square. The corners were pulled together and twisted up tight. Then he placed the packet on the forked end of his toasting stick and held it close to the hot coals. Slowly I saw the foil start to bulge out as the moisture caused steam to build up. He adjusted the packet a couple times and we could hear the contents cooking.

This went on for maybe five minutes or so, and he opened the container as it lay on the side of the fire pack. Boy did that ever look and smell good. It didn't take me long to catch on.

Boy, was that a deluxe meal. We both had brought along some extra food to eat besides the C rations in our fire pack.

Well, with a good, rib-sticking meal under our belts and a big pile of wood nearby it seemed only natural to try and get some rest. Our fireplace was near perfect. The big fan not only reflected the heat but acted as a windbreak. What more could a couple old hillbilly smoke chasers ask for?

I always carried a sheepskin vest in my fire pack, just in case it turned off cold if I had to spend the night out. Claude had latched onto a burlap drop parachute, rolled it up and added it to the top of his fire pack. It might help if it got cold. I laid down on my made-to-order bed and put my tin hat over my face. Talk about solid comfort, this was it.

The Great Horned Owl was usually the first night wildlife to start making a fuss. Seemed like there were always two at a time and hollered to one another back and forth across the mountainside. (All my life I have been in the hills and mountains day and night, including 31 years working for the U. S. Forest Service, and I have yet to see or hear a Spotted Owl.)

Sleep caught up with me and I faded away. Suddenly I heard something hit my tin hat. There it was again, only more of the tick, tick sound. I removed my hat for a better listen, only to be hit in the face with a half dozen rain drops. But, believe it or not, it lasted about five minutes and quit. I don't believe Claude ever knew about the rain. A sound restful sleep set in on me until the sudden feel of intense heat woke me up.

Claude had done himself up in the burlap parachute. But it just have well been that much screen wire because the cool night breeze went right through it. He froze out and started stoking up the fire. He used up every bit of the wood from our pile. Some were good-sized limbs. The fire got so hot it ran me right out of my bed and he was still shivering and his teeth were chattering. The burlap was wrapped around the top of his head and body. Reminded me of an Indian sitting there. It was 2:30 A.M.

I cleaned out another place to rest, laid down and went right back to sleep. Daylight woke me up.

Claude was busy stirring up the fire and getting ready to eat a C ration

breakfast. It didn't take me long to get squared around and do the same. Out like that a hot can of pork and beans really isn't too bad for breakfast. There was canned fruit and pound cake, too. At least this should get us by until we found the fire. Smoke jumpers always carried a lot of store-bought goodies including real loaves of bread and cookies.

After we ate, the fire was put dead out. One last look at our happy home and we lit out on a due north tangent. I wouldn't call Rustler Peak until around seven o'clock. Now we could see where our footsteps fell.

There was one huge Doug Fir that spanned the deep draw like a foot bridge. Boy, that was a snap to get on the yon side. A ridge ahead of us might put us in sight of where our fire was. Now and then there was the smell of wood smoke in the air. Once up on top, sure enough, right ahead were two big white and orange jump chutes. The two men left them hanging in the brush and short trees on purpose so we could see them. A hundred feet beyond the parachutes we saw two men mopping up the fire.

They were glad to see us. I was the man in charge and signed release papers so the men could pack up and leave. While I did that, one man took Claude and walked around the perimeter of the fire. They had it well on its way to being out. The men had named it the Hour Glass Fire because that was the way it was shaped.

I called Rustler Peak and told them the news. The two smoke jumpers headed out. Someone would be at the road to take them back to the Cave Junction smoke jumper base. Said they might get to jump on another fire before the day was done.

Claude and I sized things up. Lightning had struck a live tree near an old rotten log that was maybe three feet in diameter. It started a fire in it and also burned off a quarter acre of dry brush and deep duff. That was when Rustler Peak got their first shot. Everything was rained out but the dry rotten log. It kept barbecuing away for 18 days. Soon the area around it had dried out, and hot coals from the log rekindled the debris and brush, and away it went again. Now, in effect, we had two fires, ¼ acre each. They were joined together by a six foot burned-out place about 20 feet long. Hence the name, Hour Glass Fire.

To put this fire dead out we used the dry mop up method. The only water we had was for drinking only. We crawled around on our hands and knees for the next three or four hours, digging out hot spots, such as burning roots and dead limbs. Each place was dug out, the chunks rubbed in the damp dirt, until no heat was left. And the place was spaded up and mixed with dirt.

We knocked off to eat a bite around eleven o'clock and kept an eye on every bit of the recent burned-off area. It looked like the potential forest killer was dead out. And it was policy back then for a smoke chaser to spend six daylight hours there, after the last spark was out.

There was only one more hot spot toward the center that cropped up. An old, dry stump about six inches in diameter started coming to life. We had it cornered in five minutes or less. We started counting from there.

Sure enough, the smoke jumper men had left a lot of canned goods behind. Claude and I divided up the spoil between us and then stretched out to rest up. If we stayed there until the six hours were up, it would be seven o'clock before we could leave. We knew the Hour Glass Fire was done in.

I called in and let Rustler Peak know we saw our last hot spot at ten o'clock. Claude and I fudged a little more and left the fire at two o'clock. It took us just 45 minutes to reach the road and find our cars. There was just no use spending all that time on the fire after we died out that last little stump.

Claude and I calculated the time we would get to my station if we stayed out there the whole six hours. It would have been around eight o'clock. I would not check in until that time or later.

The reason we were able to walk from the fire to our cars in 45 minutes was because we knew our directions. Rustler Peak was in plain view the whole way. But, when we went in to the fire there was no way of knowing what the best route was. So, we had to go the way our dispatcher had suggested. We didn't care. After all, it gave me material to write another true story about two hillbilly mountain men chasing smoke in the tall and uncut. We lived and worked in a forest we loved so much.

Ready to hit the trail...

CHAPTER EIGHT
GHOST FIRE ON TITANIC CREEK

When an electric storm passes over the forest, sometimes there are only a few lightning strikes come down, although cloud to cloud flashes put on quite a show, at night especially.

Then again, it seems like every bit of the flashes come straight down and strike something. Lightning will not strike a snag. It would have to be saturated with water first. Ninety nine percent of the time lightning will strike a live tree, rock outcropping, and even buildings and utility poles.

It is not true that lightning won't strike in the same locality twice in a row. I saw one hard hit area where there were nine different trees with a six to ten inch strip ripped from their sides. Every tree was within a 40 foot circle. A couple acre fire started because of it.

I have seen huge trees that must have actually exploded. Chunks weighing 500 or 600 pounds would be blasted a hundred yards from the strike. One big Doug Fir tree at Lodgepole pasture had a groove 2½ feet deep and over 3 feet wide, peeled right from the lower 70 or 80 feet, and threw chunks over 400 feet away.

There was a big Shasta Fir tree with the top 60 feet blown out. It lay on the ground, completely veneered. Every annual growth ring was separated.

What happens when lightning hits a tree, the moisture literally turns to steam and explodes, and does so intently. The heat is so intense.

When I was out with the pack string and a lightning storm caught up with us, I always left the animals. I would get down, tie every one short, grab my saddle bags and put a hundred feet or so between me and the sweaty mules. Stock draw lightning.

If lightning ever made a direct hit on a lookout tower there would be no damage unless the man forgot to disconnect his telephone or radio antenna. Usually when the cable is disconnected it is placed in a coffee cup. Sparks fly from the wire, causing a ticking sound.

The towers and ground houses are grounded with heavy copper wire. The charge goes directly into the ground. But the air is full of static electricity. Tongues of fire lap along on all metal in the house. One man said his sharp butcher knife was laying on the table. When flame rolled along on the metal it turned the sharp edge into something that resembled a saw blade.

There are many dry lightning storms that come along, usually in the late summer or early fall. The clouds are full of electricity but not much water. What little falls usually vaporizes before it hits the ground. But the lightning does hit the ground. Boy, does that ever touch off a lot of fires. I saw 26 fires ignited from one storm on the Cascade Divide one year. Everything was tinder dry and took off quickly.

Then there are the storms that come up and down the three divides bordering the Rogue River Valley, that carry a lot of water and hail. Usually there aren't very many fires from one of those.

There are also mild lightning storms that come and go in a half hour or so. It was one of these kind that snuck in on the south and a little west on the slopes of Rustler Peak.

The man and wife team knew that there had been a hot strike, but so far, nothing showed up. It was on or near a stream called Titanic Creek. It was in a canyon and the area was hid from view. Even Blue Rock couldn't see in there very well for the same reason. Nevertheless, both lookouts kept a close watch.

The strike came down at 3:22 p.m. If there was a fire everyone hoped it would show before dark, especially me. It was in my area.

Sure enough, just a little after 4 p.m., smoke began to rise above the ridge top from Titanic Creek Canyon. Blue Rock saw it about the same time Rustler did.

It was plotted out and called in to headquarters. My phone rang at Lodgepole and the dispatcher said, "I hope you got your toenails trimmed, cause you have a hot one to chase down."

Boy, that sounded good to me, and I was ready to copy. Here was another live one, another challenge. Now if I could only find it before dark.

The man at headquarters told me he was going to send one man who would meet me at Parker Meadows camp. I was to take off immediately because he would have any further orders in hand when I got there.

I took off for the camp taking the fastest route. That was up the River Road to Upper South Fork camp, then it wasn't too far on up to where Rustler Peak Road took off.

Upon arrival I sat and waited for my helper who had to drive a little farther. He showed up just before the sun disappeared behind the mountain.

I was truly glad to see who it was. My old friend, Lloyd Holmes, stepped from his rig with a big grin on his face. He was just as thrilled and happy as could be. I was certainly glad it was Lloyd. He and I always did work mighty good together.

Lloyd was the kind of man who never gave up no matter how tough or aggravating a job or task got. He held up his end of every project we were turned loose on. His attitude about everything and everybody was to be a morale builder. He and I would run this smoke down and have fun doing it. He loved a challenge like this, better than most men I knew. I could hardly wait to get going.

The final orders were to drive up the Rustler Peak road maybe a mile or so and take off on a course that would lead us to Titanic Creek. At some point along the route we would be able to spot Rustler Peak if it wasn't too dark. We would shine our flashlights toward them, and they could tell us if we were

headed right and how close we were to the fire. Our Forest radio worked good.

We each carried a 45 pound fire pack. I packed the radio and Lloyd flung a crosscut saw over one shoulder. We hit the brush for parts unknown.

By looking at a contour map it seemed like the going wouldn't be too bad. But I'll tell you what, there are a lot of things a map doesn't bring out.

We contoured around the southeast side of the lower one fourth of Rustler Peak. Soon there was what could have been part of an old burn. The brush was thick but not very tall. Snow had caused it to slant downhill. The stems under foot were a bearcat! It was difficult to keep from falling down by slipping on the wet slick limbs or stumbling over them. It was getting dark.

Soon I heard a thumpty bump to my left. Lloyd had put both feet on the same slick stem and fell. When I looked around he was coming out from under the tops of a patch of slick leaf brush. I couldn't help but laugh. For a moment all I could see was arms and legs flying around as the crosscut saw went twanging out over the brush, and his tin hat finally settled to earth. I could hear him laughing, too.

About that time I, too, lost my footing and a repeat performance occurred, very suddenly. Only, that time I was the star of the show. We more or less just laid there for a moment and rested. I saw Lloyd pointing toward the top of the mountain. What he saw was the shimmering light from a Coleman gas lantern they had hanging on a hook at the south side of the tower of Rustler Peak.

I switched on the radio and we groped around for flashlights that were carried in side pockets on the fire packs. I called Rustler Peak and told them we could see their light and we were shining ours toward them. They said it looked like two lost fireflies down in the dark heavily timbered canyon.

They were unable to see any smoke now, but according to their estimate, we were less than a half mile away. We should continue on our course and stay above the canyon and soon the smell of wood smoke should start showing up.

Lloyd and I were having fun. It was tough going out there in country we had heard about a lot, but had never been there. We really had to watch our step. At least there were no rattlesnakes to worry about.

We soon lost track of the lookout light. I called to let them know. They said we should be almost to the fire, but were quite surprised that there wasn't any smoke yet.

We were pussy-footing along the southeast top quarter of a ridge. There were places where the going wasn't too bad. Even then it might be disastrous to try and hurry. It was getting on toward 10 p.m., and still no fire. What a bummer.

Finally, we came to a place where the terrain was almost level. There were big trees all around us. The flashlights were mounted on our tin hats and

tilted so we could see the ground before we took a step. Suddenly my light did not hit the ground. That instant, Lloyd experienced the same fright. The two of us shined the lights ahead, and right in front of us was nothing but a dark hole. We had come to the edge of an abrupt cliff. We couldn't smell any smoke yet either.

Well, from here on we were stymied. Just like a couple lost kids. But that never bothered us one bit.

In a couple minutes Lloyd chose a dandy spot about a hundred yards from the cliff. Said it would be a perfect place to spend the rest of the night. To me that was just good sensible thinking. I called Rustler Peak, and told them the story. Headquarters agreed that we should shut down for now and continue our hunt at daylight. Now was the time for Lloyd and I to really enjoy life out here in the tall and uncut.

He and I went about making a safe camp and talking about other things as we progressed. While he was cleaning out a safe place to build ourselves a fire, I started rounding up wood. There was truly an abundance of dead limbs of all sizes. Also I took a good look around to make sure nothing would fall on us as we slept.

The way I saw things right at the moment, Lloyd and I were two of the luckiest men alive. Here we were, sitting near a dandy campfire, laughing and joking about something. Real soon we found out that the two of us were not alone.

It appeared that we were right in the middle of a genuine wildlife habitat. There were three Great Horned Owls hooting away. One was down beyond the cliff we saw, another one sounded off toward Rustler, and the third one must have followed along as we beat the brush.

It was really neat the way they called back and forth to each other. Also, to add to our enjoyment, a pack of coyotes started yipping and yelling south of our camp about a half mile. There were other sounds and noises, but we couldn't figure if they were caused by some animal, or just happened.

Lloyd and I had fought a lot of fire. We had learned how to enjoy down to earth roughing it. There are so many things that are learned by trial and error and paying attention to old timers.

We each carried a chunk of tin foil at least three feet long and 20 inches wide. Folded up, it didn't take up much room for size or weight. It was used, in effect, as a cooking utensil.

A cold can of meatballs and spaghetti, or beef patties, can be heated up quick and easy. First, a chunk of foil is torn off, square. The food is dumped from the can into the center. All four corners are pulled together and twisted. It should be placed in the edge of a bed of hot coals. Immediately it starts to heat up, and the foil container starts to bulge. In around five minutes or so, a hot good tasting meal is ready.

After supper we each fashioned ourselves a spot to stretch out. Our fire

was maybe five feet long and burning good. I had tossed on three long ten inch logs, two down on the fire and one on top. Flames were curling up around the top log, and it should hold fire real good.

We had no sleeping bags, but who cared? My empty fire pack made a good pillow. Lloyd slept on one side of our long fire, and I stretched out with my back to the fire on the off side, and in a moment, sleep took over. I came to, about halfway, two different times, only to shift my body or remove a rock or tree limb from my bed. Of course, at daybreak, Lloyd and I woke up at about the same time.

It took a little stomping to get loosened up and stretch some. Lloyd went out to take a look at the cliff we came to last night. I walked the other direction, looking for some firewood. It was then that I got the surprise of a lifetime!

Less than a hundred yards west of us, I saw smoke. It was coming from a burning cat face on a Shasta Fir tree. (A cat face is a fire scar, usually on the uphill side of a tree. The burned wood rots away, forming a scar that is wide at the bottom and narrows at the top. I have seen cat faces like this from one to twelve or fifteen feet high, caused from previous fires.)

The smoke came up and went straight away from us because of local wind currents in the canyon below. It was hard to believe, but neither of us could smell smoke until we were maybe 50 feet from it. We had found the fire!

A Shasta Fir tree about five feet in diameter grew near the edge of the cliff, back about ten feet. Lightning had struck it and touched off the dry rotten wood in the cat face at its base. The rotten wood burned hot and dried the green portion of the tree trunk. That was the material burning now. There was very little ground fire.

I called Rustler Peak, and again, told what was going on. It sounded like a made up, put up job, but it was for real. At least Lloyd and I got a good night's sleep. In fact, if we had found the fire we couldn't have done a thing to it. A burning tree like that is too unpredictable and could have come down at any time. We would have had to back off and watch until it fell or became light enough to see what it looked like.

The tree finally came down and did not scatter fire like a Doug Fir or Pine might cause. Mop up was fairly easy. Once the hot spots were knocked down and dug into the moist soil, it was feel and dig from there on. It was pronounced dead out by 10 a.m. Now all we had to do was spend six daylight hours there after the last spark was out.

Lloyd and I were seasoned forest fire fighters. There were certain things we learned to watch for such as burning stumps and tree roots, no matter how small. I had seen a fire get away one time that was only 30 or 40 feet across. It had been mopped up and a good fire line put around it. But there was a small smoldering tree root the smoke chasers missed on the upper side. It took half a day and into the night before it burned across the line,

morning when the sun started to get hot. As for the other object he saw, that country is covered with long fingers of lava rock, scattered down through tall timber. If I had to head out on this one there was no doubt in my mind that it would be another false smoke. One thing for sure, it was going to be a fun time for me if it was.

Sure enough they dispatched me to the Red Lake Fire #4. One of the mules carried enough tools and supplies for four men if need be, should I need to holler for help. The other mule carted all the comforts of home except the kitchen sink, and the way old Dillon was moaning and groaning under his 80 pound load, he thought it was on his back, too.

In the Red Lake country the terrain is anywhere from real level to steep, rough country littered with lava dikes. The afternoon sun will shine in on these places and really play tricks on even an experienced lookout man. Shadows move around and cause a man to really become confused. Besides, he is so afraid that he will miss a fire and maybe be jumped onto. Hence, Red Lake Fire #4.

I left Lodgepole at around 11:30 a.m. I hauled my stock to the Red Lake Trail head at Wickiup Forest Camp on the Parker Meadows Road, about eight miles away. It didn't take me long to unload and pack up. Each mule was carrying a shy 100 pounds; that isn't much compared to a regular load.

I headed up the trail, past Doyle Springs. The site was named after a man who accidentally shot himself while getting a drink of water. He was found the next day, and a Forest Service employee hauled the body out on a pack mule.

Wickiup Junction showed up at the left of the trail. That one went down past Wickiup Springs and shelter. Onion Springs Junction is at the shelter. The trail continues on nearly due east to the Cascade Summit and on down to the Oregon Skyline Trail to Lake Land. (The old Oregon Skyline Trail was renamed to the Pacific Crest Trail to correspond with the National Recreation Trail System.)

The first trip I had ever made up the Red Lake Trail was after dark. I departed from the Wickiup Campground on the Parker Meadows Road at 10 p.m. A pickup came up from Butte Falls Ranger Station loaded with fire fighting equipment. The driver handed me a note from the dispatcher that read, "Everything goes to Red Lake Fire but the spare tire."

I rode a big black horse call Budd. On some switch backs along the way he tried his best to turn and go back down the trail.

Actually it was a dandy ride except for one thing. The driver of the pickup rode in with me. I put him on an old gray mare and he insisted on bringing up the rear to rush things along. He even tried to tell me how to load mules and figured the diamond hitch was the only way to go. Well, I set him straight about that when the guy grabbed up one of my lash ropes and complained about it being too long. He tossed over one of my loads and

proceeded to tell me how I should help him throw a double diamond.

I was really getting bogged down with this nut, and he was wasting my time. So I squared off and set him straight about who and how my three mule load was going to be lashed down. It made him mad enough and caused him to swear a little.

We headed up the trail around 11 p.m., darker than all get out. I could hear him hollering and yelling back there for the first couple miles and hoped I'd stir up a real hot yellow jacket's nest just to hear what might happen.

Suddenly my pack string went nuts. They really took off toward me at a dead run. Thinking they really had uncovered a yellow jacket's nest, I took off. But I realized they were not bucking and kicking.

It dawned on me that the hot-shot would-be packer back there had thrown a dead tree limb and hit Tom on the rump. They left the old boy in a cloud of dust. But the next thing he saw was me standing in the trail waiting for him to show up.

I shined his eyes with a flashlight, then lowered it and set him straight in no uncertain terms. And I was not very diplomatic about it either. I fired him on up the trail ahead of me and he never spoke a word after that. We arrived at Red Lake at three o'clock in the morning.

All these things were going through my mind as I rode along today. There were many other interesting events that had happened along here, too numerous to mention.

I arrived at my take off point one mile north of Red Lake. In fact, it was almost the same place I met a 12 man fire crew when the loud mouth guy was with me.

I called Blue Rock to let him know I was there. In fact, I went to where the tower was in sight and flashed the guy with a mirror. He said the fire was nearly due west about ¼ mile. I couldn't see or smell a thing.

I knew for blame sure I wasn't going to do any foot work. The best way to handle an oddball situation like this was to ride my horse and play it by ear. In fact the lookout man was telling me to tackle this thing on foot and to carry a fully equipped fire pack.

I didn't argue, just did what came naturally. Tom and Dillon didn't like it too well when their lead ropes were tied short, hard and fast to a couple Mountain Hemlock Trees. Once in the saddle I headed due west and rode for almost ¼ mile before a half mile long dike crossed my path. The Blue Rock tower was standing high in the distance. Wasn't much use in putting my mirror on him (flashing the lookout), because my radio was hung on a tree limb back by the mule, on purpose.

From there on I rode north along side of the wide pile of broken up lava rock. Soon, sure enough, there was an old tree blaze that marked the way from Red Lake Trial to a 20 acre fire a year or so ago. It went across three different lava dikes that were 50 to 80 feet across.

Soon I turned back and rode south for quite a ways. When the horse's shod feet bumped against a rock the mules heard the noise. Every time one or both of them would blast off with a loud hee-haw. Sometimes they were northeast of me or east, even southeast. But, when I wanted to head back to my starting point, every so often Tom and Dillon would put up a fuss. No way could I get lost. They would holler me back to the trail.

It took an hour of looking to try and prove there was no #4 fire anywhere in the country. Even then the oddball on Blue Rock was hard to convince that there wasn't. If he had his way my critters and I would have spent the night at Red Lake for nothing. Finally, right in the middle of his conversation telling me what to do, it was real handy to turn the radio off and head for home. Besides, there were two or three side trips it would be nice to take. That way it wouldn't be a total lost cause making the dry run.

Back at Lodgepole I called the dispatcher after hours and clued him in. At that time he was very doubtful about the reliability of the Blue Rock Lookout. The guy was always looking for an excuse to get off the tower, but nothing worked. Not only was the man supposed to watch for forest fires, he was also apt to be sent out on a smoke because his title was Lookout-Fireman.

He pondered the situation awhile and decided to do something drastic. Early one morning the guy went down to his car, picked up a football-sized rock and slammed it through his windshield. Then he busted out a side window for good measure.

Back up the ladder he went, flipped on his radio and started calling for help. The dispatcher was swayed off guard at first, but finally caught on. The man said someone had broken his car windshield out, and also a side window, during the night. Since it was his smoke chasing car it would have to be repaired immediately. But the funny thing was, if he was sent on a fire the guy would be on foot because most of his fires would be more in the wilderness country such as Sky Lake, Blue Canyon, etc.

The dispatcher assured him that he could come down that morning. And while he was at it, be sure and load all his belonging in the car before he pulled out, because today was his last day working for the U.S. Forest Service.

My boss would head for Blue Rock with a replacement and help the other guy move out. By nightfall there would be a new man covering one of the most critical areas on the forest.

As for me, I was always ready, willing, and able to head out into the tall and uncut, either on foot or horseback. It didn't make any difference which direction the dispatcher sent me. It was a brand new challenge every single time.

During my years at Lodgepole, I spent many a night out on a fire or looking for one. The challenge was to find it, or where lightning had struck. On a real fire it was up to me to put it dead out so no one would ever have to return to that site again.

A lightning strike that starts a fire and is rained out, the area around the place has a smell that resembles the inside of a smokehouse full of hog meat. Sometimes steam is still rising from the hot wood. I loved that job very much. But the packing job was even better because I really was out there seven days a week and all hours of the day and night. The things I saw, heard and did all those years were truly something to write down for someone else to feel what I went through and what a tough wonderful life it was.

Gordon and his friends...this is the life he loves.

CHAPTER TEN
FIREFLY BLAZE. FRY CREEK

From the last week in June until the first of November, things around Lodgepole were alive with activity. I was in the saddle seven days a week most of the time. On many a trip my pack and saddle stock and I wouldn't ride in until well after midnight, if at all. Even after the Forest Service bought me a truck to haul the animals in, many times the tail lights shined off the pole fence as a guide to back against the loading ramp.

The work was hard and the hours were long, but the rough and tumble life of a mule skinner really grows on a man. The harder and longer a pack trip took, the better I liked it.

All those long days I was away from my station it worried me that maybe a fire would pop up and I wouldn't be home to chase the smoke. This did happen once in awhile, much to my disgust.

My family, (wife and five youngins) Bea, Don, Tricia, Janna, Leslie, and Tracy, found no end of things to do and places to explore. Their pets were a little dog called Jeffie, a three-colored cat, and of all things, a pet porcupine called Freddie. Talk about a rare combination, that was it.

We acquired the quilly little animal from some friends of ours who lived at Camp Two Guard Station. Someone had shot the baby's mother and they took it on themselves to save its life. It worked.

The first time we ever saw Freddie he was parked on the limb of a ten foot tall Pine tree. There was a high wire cage around it so he couldn't escape. The people who owned him were Dick and Erma Bower and their little girl, Nancy.

We went out to see Freddie and see what the little black bundle of quills looked like, close up. We walked toward his cage real quiet. When we were all there, Dick hollered, "Hey, Freddie, are you hungry?"

The porcupine jumped like someone had jabbed him with a pin. Dick held up a slice of bread and slowly he started to back down the tree. The closer to the ground he got, the more he would try to hurry. Even then, his progress was really slow. Finally he stood on all four legs and looked around.

Dick held the slice of bread through the fence, Freddie carefully took it in his front paws, and sat up on his haunches like a squirrel. He turned the bread as he nibbled away, clear down to the last little bite. After cramming it quickly into his mouth he dropped down on all fours and begged for more by making cute little humming noises. That night they asked if we would like to be the proud owners of Freddie. Who could refuse? They would bring him to Lodgepole the next day.

As time marched on, so did Freddie. The little guy started growing. His five masters kept him well fed from a little bit of whatever they were eating,

which was most of the time, it seemed. Soon our pet started to change according to his instincts.

Out at one corner of the horse corral was an old abandoned cattle guard made from eight inch logs. It wasn't used anymore because the main Lodgepole road came in east of the buildings. Freddie found the nice hiding place and would sleep there until about 3:00 p.m. Then he would wake up and start looking for his caretakers.

When Freddie came to, we could hear him coming as he meandered along. He seemed to carry on a humming tune as the amusing little feller walked across the yard.

The Walker youngins would run toward him. He sat up, looking for a handout. Someone would pick him up by his front legs and he would be placed on one of the children's arms. Freddie's belly was soft and covered with long fur, the only smooth place on him.

Generally they would all head for the house, including the dog and cat. It was always just like a picnic for Freddie.

From then on for the rest of the day the porcupine would follow wherever the young Walkers went. Janna used to carry him as he lay along her arm but he was getting heavy and it didn't work. Between the five of them they worked out a solution.

I came riding in from Imnaha one day. The children came to meet me. They had rigged up a paste board box with hand holds on each side. Don was on one side and Tricia on the other, carrying Freddie. He was standing on his hind legs and leaning over the front edge, humming away as they walked. We enjoyed having Freddie around for two summers at Lodgepole. He tipped the scales at 45 pounds.

One time I was pulling in from a two day drag moving a trail crew camp. It was mid-afternoon and I had not eaten dinner yet. (lunch to you) Everyone waited for me in the yard until the rigging and stock were cared for. When I approached the yard gate Don said, "Guess what, there was a fire yesterday afternoon."

I had been right under a lightning storm at that time, riding up a long narrow ridge. There wasn't anything to do except keep moving. Small hail came down in torrents, about half the size of a marble. It lasted for ten minutes or more. Sounded like it was beating on two tin roofs as it roared against the canvas pack covers. Boy, did I get wet, but the hot sun came through the clouds and dried us off. The mule's packs steamed like they were on fire.

During the storm a strike had come down and touched a big old growth Douglas Fir on Fry Creek, about two miles east of Black Bear Swamp. There were six men who went to the fire and spent the night. Apparently they planned on coming away from there in late afternoon. That would have been my fire.

About 7:00 p.m., a vehicle rattled across the cattle guard. We were about to have company. We all went out to see the crew, including Freddie, who was certainly a favorite with everyone.

The foreman told me the story. Lightning had hit and come down a huge Doug Fir tree, right by Fry Creek, near where the old Seven Lakes Trail crossing used to be. The logs and other debris were thick and deep. In some places the line was over two feet deep and three feet wide. About ¼ acre had burned. At least there was plenty of water handy for mop up. He figured maybe the boss might send me in the next day to check and see if it was dead out. That was why he gave me specific directions. The crew loaded up and pulled out as Freddie was enjoying an old stale doughnut from somebody's lunch pail.

I called headquarters and said the Fry Creek fire crew was on their way in. At the same time the boss asked me to ride in the next day in late morning and check things out. And for me to call Rustler Peak if anything showed up.

Well, even if this wasn't my fire, at least there would be a little pleasure in going back and looking things over after six seasoned firemen put it out.

Next morning my beautiful white half Arab mare was saddled along about ten o'clock. I mounted up and headed back into the tall and uncut. It felt so good riding on such a spirited animal. She would cover six miles an hour on a 40 mile trip any time, and still be going strong. It didn't take long to reach my destination.

My mare, called Molly, waited patiently for me as she nibbled at the top of Huckleberry brush. Boy did it ever take a lot of work to put a line around this baby. The men had to cut and dig line from one to over two feet deep, and a couple places were over three feet wide for twenty feet or more. Sure lucky these fellers had plenty of water to work with from Fry Creek.

I sat down on a log that was propped up at one end by a hump of dirt. I intended to spend an hour or so here, then ride on up to Frog Lake to see if anyone was camping there.

Due north of me was a big rock that was maybe 12 feet across at the ground, and it tapered up from both sides to form a rounded top about 10 feet high. It reminded me of something. A few years back Dick Bower and I were looking for a section corner that appeared to be lost. I was telling one of the old-timers about it one day, and the elderly Butte Falls man told me how to find it.

I was to go to where the old Seven Lakes Trail crossed Fry Creek. At that point, I would look north and see the big rock I described. I should climb to the top, look north, and pick a spot about 40 feet away, remove the dead leaves and matted duff, and a section corner rock should show up.

This rock would be wide at the bottom and taper to a rounded top and should be around 20 inches high. The corner markings would be on the east side.

I did what the man said. In a half hour or so my partner and I had found a place where four section corners came together.

As I sat reminiscing, something started to happen. High above where I sat I heard something snap. The next thing that caught my eye was several red hot sparks that drifted down around me. They reminded me of fireflies the way they zigzagged back and forth before they hit the ground.

As I watched overhead, sure enough, it happened a couple more times. There was a lot of fire left in the top of the lightning-struck tree. Coals would pop from the burning place, fall down through the boughs, and break up into tiny pieces. Every time this happened it reminded me of how maybe fireflies look on a dark night, except this was in the middle of the day.

The radio man at Medford had given me a real light radio that fit in my saddle bags. I pulled it out, attached the antenna, and called Rustler Peak. He in turn called my boss and told him what was going on. He sure wasn't too happy when he found out that his crew hadn't dropped the very tree that was struck. He dispatched four men back in on foot to finish their job. I held tough until they arrived and did not hang around to help out.

There was still a lot of day left so Molly and I went on up to Frog Lake to look around. Then we came back down the new trail to Black Bear Camp where my truck was.

If it had been me that was in charge of that fire, I would have put that tree down as soon as all hot spots were cooled off. It would have been laid right up the tread of the old trail for easy mop up. It would have been cut down even if I couldn't see any fire up there. 60 feet totally obscure. It was not worth taking a chance on trying to save it.

This was another fire behind me, and I learned by someone else's mistake. Back at Lodgepole it felt good to be home early for once. But the next day was going to be another long one. I had to cargo 400 pounds of dynamite and 300 electric caps to the trail crew at Heather Ponds. The men were building a new stretch of trail around the east side of Venus, Jupiter, and Lucifer Mountains. Someday it might become a part of the Pacific Crest Trail System. It would be another 14 hour day, but I sure wouldn't have done it if I wasn't having fun.

Freddie the Porcupine.

CHAPTER ELEVEN
FIRE IN THE HOLE. RUSTLER PEAK

Many times I have told different ones about living at an out of the way place like Lodgepole. They asked if we ever got lonesome or felt left out in any way. My answer was always, "...most definitely not."

Even though there were several days in a row when no one dropped by to visit, there was still too much going on to get lonely or bored. Our only link to civilization was a ground line telephone that worked most of the time, and we were tied in to every lookout and guard station on the district, except Devil's Peak.

The five little Walkers never ever lacked for something to occupy themselves. Their only limit was their imagination. And what one didn't think of, the other one did. It was amazing what these youngins could dream up.

There was a Lodgepole Pine thicket just across the yard fence to the west. I showed Don how to use a fano-saw. It has a curved blade about 14 inches long with an 8 or 9 inch handle. The saw cuts only as the cutter pulls it toward him. Later Don showed Tricia and Janna how to use it.

They cut off low limbs and little trees. With a lot of work and green limb piling, a series of trails were opened up everywhere within the six or eight acre area. They rigged up poles, crisscrossed them with boughs, and made themselves fort-like structures. Something like that was very appealing to Freddie, except for one thing. He would waddle off somewhere and go to sleep.

Another fun thing was to build dirt and rock dams in Lodgepole Creek. The water was slow running and pure. Boy, did they get wet and dirty, which was no problem at all.

Of course the ever-searching for wild strawberries, or "sarvice" berries was a wonderful thing to fall back on. And there were numerous other things that five young hillbillies thrived on.

There was an interesting pack trip coming up on the following Monday morning. Back in the high country is a place called King Spruce. At one time there was a guard station there and a pasture with a couple corrals for horses and mules.

It got its name because of a huge Spruce tree growing in the edge of a meadow, next to a hill. I would say that the tree is 8 foot in diameter breast high, and is healthy and still growing.

King Spruce Country is a wide canyon-like place. It is covered with lots of grass. Cattle spent part of their grazing season in that part of the country. But there is a poisonous plant that grew on the hillside and down along the flat, called Larkspur. If a cow starts eating it they seem to become addicted

and really fill up. Soon they become ill and develop a fever. When that happens they will drink a lot of water and start to bloat. Soon the cow will die, generally right in the creek.

That year there was money allocated to buy weed poison and eliminate the cow killer. That morning seven men came to Lodgepole. Five of the fellows were the ones who were going to apply the weed spray, and there was a two man trail crew that would open up the one mile stretch from Seven Lakes Trail to King Spruce.

There were three pack mules ready to go. They were equipped with bags and lash ropes so as to carry the jugs of spray and five backpack spray cans. I lined out with the critters and would be at the trail head by the time the men were. My saddle horse was raring to get going.

It was sort of fun to cargo all those plastic jugs of spray. Each mule carried two spray cans. Spooky old Austin carried one on top of his load.

King Spruce Trail hadn't been cleared of all the winter debris and windfall yet. The two men cranked up a chain saw and lined out. Right at the top of the hill was a two foot snag that had gone down and a couple more green trees toward the bottom. As the five men who were the spray crew walked to King Spruce Canyon, they cleaned out all the small stuff and pruned off a few low hanging limbs.

By 11:30 p.m. my mules were tied to trees, and my saddle horse was tethered to an old pasture post put there many years ago. The spray crew wanted the material and equipment hauled up on the west hillside because that was where they were going to start the job.

From the floor of the broad canyon, up for a half mile or so, are numerous water springs trickling from the earth everywhere. Each rivulet of water runs down and joins other small streams and eventually all come together and flow toward the northwest to join a larger high mountain stream farther down.

Numerous Spruce trees are scattered, covering much of the hillside. As soon as my mules were unloaded and the jugs of spray were put in a storage place, we sat down to eat our lunches. That was my first introduction to a Chinkapin burr. I parked my posterior smack dab on one. The men laughed at me.

The burr is a seed pod that comes in various sizes and shapes. The seeds are quite large, about three or four times the size of a pea. The husk or outside of the pod of many seeds has long needle-like spines around the entire area. Black bear and squirrels tear the pods apart and eat the nuts. How they keep from getting all stuck up, I'll never know. Boy, did I ever stand upright rather sudden when I sat on that thing!

After a good laugh at my expense we all settled back to eat. I faced west toward the direction of Lodgepole. I caught sight of something that really woke me up. I didn't say anything except, "Look!"

I pointed to a high slim column of smoke coming up about two miles

south of my station. Here I was, miles away, and someone else would be sent to my fire. I hated the thought of that.

Quickly I groped around in my saddle bags and found my compass. A little adjustment and there was the azimuth from where I sat at King Spruce to the fire.

Back at Lodgepole the children were out in the yard, sitting in the shade of a Pine tree, eating a lunch their mother had made up. Don happened to be facing south. He leaned slightly back to take a man-sized bite from his sandwich. When it was about halfway to his mouth he got a wide-eyed look in his eyes. Coming up from the tall tree tops was a column of smoke.

They all forgot about eating and went dashing into the house looking for their mother. She saw the fire and returned to the house where the telephone sat. She had never used it.

Finally after some coaching from the little ones Rustler Peak heard it ring. Later they told me it sounded like everyone was talking at once on the Lodgepole end of the line.

Bea told about the column of smoke that appeared to be maybe a couple miles out of Lodgepole to the south. Rustler looked and couldn't see a thing. But while she had them on the phone the children took another look. The fire was getting bigger, and the smoke was black and dark gray. The people who manned Rustler were at their wit's end.

Almost a half hour after Don saw the smoke, the man and wife spotted it coming up over a ridge. It was burning hot in some deep logging slash out of sight of Rustler and no one else had picked it up yet. When I saw the smoke, Rustler had just made the discovery. My compass azimuth was a good cross shot from King Spruce.

I headed back for Lodgepole that day. Boy, was the place a boil with activity. The youngins met me at the yard gate, talking all at once. Don finally told me what was happening, and how he was the first one to see the fire. He told me all about what they were doing.

First, it started near a log landing in heavy slash. There were no machines or logging equipment around. Apparently it was another lighting fire, sleeper. A tree had been hit nearby, it rained real hard and almost put it out, but not quite.

Don went on to say, "There are two pumpers at the scene and a ten man crew." It had burned off almost three acres before the lookout people could see it.

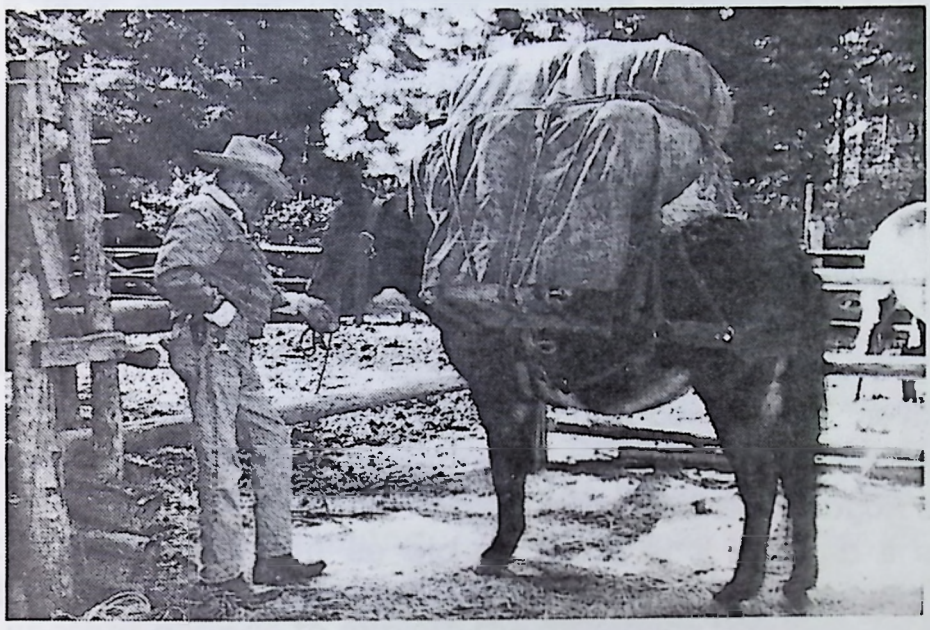
I called in and asked if I should show up at the fire too. The boss said he wanted me there the next day to take charge and supervise the mop up procedures. It could be a long day.

Actually I was able to pull out from the fire shortly after lunch time. The boss wanted me to get on back to my station and get ready for another pack trip. Bessie Rock needed new radio batteries and also his food supply was

getting low. I was to drive in to Butte Falls and pick everything up today.

Don got a call from the man and his wife who were on Rustler Peak. They said for a little boy he certainly knew what to do if he saw a fire. Also my boss dropped by later on and Don told him all about how he turned the fire in. Everyone had heard how Don had spotted a real forest fire before anyone else laid an eye on it. We were very proud of him, too.

After that every single day the children scanned the countryside for another fire. And that was the way things went the rest of the years we lived at our summer home, Lodgepole.



There's an old packer if ever you saw one!

CHAPTER TWELVE
SAM CREEK FIRE. WICKIUP CAMP OUT.

When my family and I first moved to Lodgepole Guard Station in June of 1953, we were amazed at the numerous live, clear water streams that crossed the roadways. Even up on the side of Rustler Peak there are small creeks flowing. They come from numerous water springs large and small.

One evening we decided to take a drive and look things over, just to get acquainted with our country. Also, there could be a porcupine cross our path, and hard telling what other animals we might see. It was a wonderful lesson in wildlife and their habitat.

Imnaha Creek was number one. It comes from several big springs just east of the Imnaha Guard Station. In fact, that is the source of water for the station. Just west of the station is a large campground.

Heading south we drove across Whitman Creek. It is one of the smaller ones that never goes dry. It comes from a single spring a half mile or so east of the road.

Spring Creek is a lively little stream. It seems to be in a hurry to reach the main Rogue River. We crossed it in the middle of an "S" turn.

Down stream there are three big Sugar Pine trees, one of which is the largest one on the entire Rogue River National Forest.

Sumpter Creek is a dandy. It is about as big as Imnaha Creek. It crosses the road at the foot of a hill. I chased smoke one time near the head waters of this high mountain stream.

It was along here that we saw a porcupine meandering up the ditch line one night. At that time the U.S. Forest Service encouraged us to kill every one we saw. (We never kill them anymore.)

I stopped the car and shot the quilly critter and brought it back and placed it in the bright beam of the car headlights. All five children got a close look at the animal's quills and how smooth its belly was, just long black hair. (That was a couple years before we got our pet porcupine called Freddie.)

Also, it was at this area where the Walker youngins saw their first baby deer. We were heading for Imnaha one day. We started downhill toward Sumpter Creek. The car went around a bend in the road and directly ahead of us was an old doe and a single fawn. Immediately I slowed to a stop to watch. Mama Deer appeared to have bumped her baby with a hind leg. It went scooting along on its belly and slid a couple of feet. It was almost hidden under an overhanging bush.

I pushed the clutch in and let the car coast to where the little one was

almost hidden. We got within three feet of the spotted little animal who was maybe two weeks old. All of us could see it real good. Its sides were pumping in and out, and its eyes were blinking. The long ears lay back next to its head.

Right there was another chance to do some more wildlife education. We could have captured the little thing real easy. But, why? There was its mother standing aways off, wishing we would leave so she could come back to her baby.

I told my family a story that none of them ever forgot. Leave those babies alone, no matter what kind of animal they are. This is their home. Besides, no one would come and try to steal one of them from Lodgepole house. Of course their mother and I would feel really bad and also put up a fight.

We took one more long look at the infant deer and drifted on down the hill aways and stopped to watch. Sure enough, here came Mama Deer to the rescue, and the two of them scurried out through the timber together.

Nichols Creek was a favorite picnic spot. There was a big Fir stump that at one time was maybe five feet across. People who camp there put food and salt on it for animals to come in and eat and lick salt. I drove into the campground entrance and turned on the side spotlight to shine the big stump. Right in the beam of the bright light stood 14 deer looking our way, their eyes just shining. They were all blacktail except one. It was a big mule tail buck. He stood up above the backs of all the rest. Here was another chance to explain the difference between the two species of deer.

Fry Creek was next. It was a real small live stream so that most people drove over it and didn't even realize it was there.

Fan Tail Creek wasn't much bigger, but I had seen limit-sized native trout in both streams. Big Ben Creek is something else. Its head waters are on the steep slopes from Hemlock Lake. To mark the corners of the bridge across the stream were four posts that stuck up maybe two feet high. They had light-colored reflectors at the top on both sides of each one. The children would watch for Big Ben as we maneuvered down the narrow crooked road. The moment the bright lights shined the reflectors it reminded us of the eyes of a wild animal. That was one of the fun things to watch for at night.

Another interesting and unusual sight was a quarter mile north of there. A Doug Fir had died and fell many years ago and the only part that remained was maybe 20 feet at the butt. It was well-rotted, but was still intact. Growing from the top and sides from the rotted, damp wood were seven different species of trees with stems from ½ inch to two inches in

diameter. The children called it their miniature forest. We had to stop so they could look it over every time we drove by.

Sam Creek was next. It was about dead center of a big burn that happened about 1920, caused by lightning. This country is where this chapter, "Sam Creek Fire, Wickiup Campout" got its name.

Wickiup Creek comes from the south edge of the Sam Creek burn, and the Red Lake Trail Head takes off from there. There used to be a dandy little campground there until a flood wiped it out.

Little Billie Creek is another small stream and isn't too popular because of the dense brush along its banks. There were a lot of limit-size trout to be caught there too.

Parker Creek is also a small live stream, that would be easy to miss if a person wasn't watching. Then we crossed the South Fork of Rogue River. It comes down from Blue Canyon with dozens of springs feeding into it all along the way. There is a good campground there and one of my favorites. I could certainly tell many stories about incidents that have occurred at that site during my six years at Lodgepole.

One of the main reasons I was stationed at Lodgepole was to be ready to fight a forest fire anytime day or night, seven days a week, all through the season. Most of the fires were kindled by lightning, but there were a few man-caused smokes that popped up, either by accident or on purpose.

I just don't know if I would rather chase smoke after a wet lightning storm or a dry one. A storm that puts down a lot of water soaks everything up to a fair-thee-well. But fires do get ignited, and I have to head out.

Talk about wet going. Every leaf is full of water, and the ground is sometimes covered with hail. The only thing that never worried me was that the fire wasn't likely to get a run on me.

Dry lightning is different and usually occurs toward the end of summer. One of the worst I ever saw happened on Labor Day Weekend. We had 21 fires on one district.

The clouds boil and tumble and are full of fire. Many times I've seen rain coming from them, but it evaporates and never hits the ground. But lightning does. You can about guess what happens.

A wet lightning storm whipped through the countryside in mid-afternoon in late August. It seemed to concentrate on the west slopes of the Cascades. Rustler Peak started seeing strikes on the lower west side of Mt. Pitt. It moved north over Parker Meadows and followed the South Fork of Rogue River drainage west of Imnaha. Sam Creek and Wickiup country seemed to be hit really hard.

About two hours before dark Rustler Peak picked up a smoke at the

east side of Sam Creek burn over next to the foot of a hill facing north. It was a dandy lightning strike and burned to beat the band for awhile just before dark. But it was raining hard too. After dark the lookout couldn't see any flame as yet.

The dispatcher called me and told me all about what was going on. He wanted me to head for the Red Lake Trail Head at Wickiup Camp. Darwin Moore would meet me there.

He figured that if Darwin and I walked up the trail about a mile we could go due north until we reached the ridge top. From there we ought to be able to look right down at the fire. Then we could work our way down to it. Sounded like a good, exciting plan to me. I headed out for parts unknown and took my little black dog, Snoopy, with me. He loved to scout new territory.

Boy, was it ever dark when I arrived at my destination. There was no one around except a family camping on the creek. Three big deer raced up the trail just before I parked my car.

I sat and listened to my car radio. My fire pack was clean and ready. Just for good measure, this time I rolled up an 8x10 foot pack cover and tied it up on top. We could use it as a shelter if we had to spend the night in the woods.

In a half hour or so, here came a set of headlights bouncing toward me along the rough crooked roadway. Darwin would no doubt be the driver of the vehicle.

Darwin and I had worked together ever since the fall of 1955. He had a way about him that caused me to recognize the fact that he was an honest man. He would do anything to help a feller out, and on top of that, if he thought that something might not work, he said so. Everyone, including myself, thought the world and all of Darwin.

He is a big man, maybe 5ft.11in. tall. He talked a little slow at times and was always very serious about important things to do. He loved a good laugh, and if a joke was on him, all the better. It was going to be a fun time chasing smoke with Darwin, no matter how rough it got.

Darwin was a snoose (snuff) chewer. He crawled from his rig, spit on the rocky ground, and said, "Howdy, looks like we got our work cut out for us."

I called Rustler Peak, told them of Darwin's arrival, and that we would be on our way within the next 15 minutes. We put our 45 pound fire packs on our backs. I carried a Forest Service radio, and Darwin packed a six foot crosscut saw. If necessary we could cut down a four foot tree, or maybe larger, if we worked at it. The saw had a good tooth guard to protect us

from the sharp teeth.

Snoopy was rearing to get going, and would dash on ahead to stir up some excitement. The first part of the trail was an uphill grind. Our headlights were mounted on our tin hats to light the way. Darwin was in the lead.

For no reason other than to make conversation, the subject about bears was mentioned. I had seen two sets of tracks along this trail a couple days ago. It was a mama and one cub.

As we talked Darwin looked up and saw a pair of eyes coming downhill, right toward him. He liked to swallowed his snoose. The light reflected the eyes that were bouncing up and down, about like a bear running. Just as he was ready to leave the trail, the animal turned off and ran on by. It was Snoopy, coming back to check on me.

We continued on up the trail until we came to the one mile sign made of porcelain. It was a green "1", with a white background and a green line around the outside. It was mounted so a man on foot or horseback could readily see it.

At that point we decided to leave our fire packs just off the trail, take a compass shot to due north, and head for the top of the ridge about ¾ mile away. 45 or 50 pounds wasn't too heavy for us two young fellers, but seems like it was sure easier to travel along.

It was open going nearly all the way. There were a few stump holes here and there that were generally hid from sight, but nothing to worry about. Boy, was it dark.

Across the top of the ridge there were many second growth Doug Fir trees, two or three feet through, with large limbs clear to the ground. We called them wolf trees because none of the limbs had ever died and fallen off the lower part of the trunk, called self-pruning.

Darwin decided to climb up into one of the biggest ones to maybe get a better view of Sam Creek Canyon. Sounded good to me, so he picked one that was just off the hill aways, and it should put him up there quite aways above everything else.

I stood on top of the ridge and watched as the beam of his head lamp ascended. He stopped about 12 feet or so from the top. From where I stood it seemed like he was almost within reach of me and I could hear everything he said. If I went to the lower side of the tree, no matter how loud he hollered, his voice wouldn't carry down to me. He couldn't see a thing.

Climbing a tree was a good idea, but it didn't produce a thing, so back to the trail we went. I was in the lead this time, and we were moving

right along through the open timber. Snoopy was really having fun. He was black and hard to see, but he never lost track of us.

Suddenly, right behind me, was a limb-snapping thud, and I heard Darwin grunt and moan slightly. Quickly I looked back to see what happened. The tall man had caved through the duff and small tree limbs that covered a deep stump hole where the wood had all rotted away. The stump hole depth was just right at shirt pocket level. Course, before he could say anything, he had to get rid of some snoose-juice first. Snoopy was standing there looking at him, wagging his stubby tail. Of course it seemed that I was the only one who laughed much. He climbed from the hole with great effort, and we continued back to the trail.

For the next two hours we made side trips from the main trail to the ridge top. No matter how much we looked and sniffed the air, like Smokey the Bear, there was nothing.

Darwin and I had beat the brush for half the night, so far for nothing. Soon a trail junction showed up in the beam of the flashlights. From there it was only a mile or so down to Wickiup Shelter. It would be best to spend the rest of the night at Wickiup Springs Shelter and line out down Sam's Creek at daybreak.

While we were on the summit I called Rustler Peak and told them our plans. There was no use in wasting energy looking for a fire tonight.

The shelter had been built during the early 1930's by men of the C.C.C., a government grant to put men to work. It is a three-sided shed-type place for people to camp, first come, first served. Lucky for us it wasn't occupied.

Darwin and I set to and got a cooking fire to warm up some "C" rations. They weren't too bad if they were real hot. Someone had left some dry wood behind inside the building. Before we pulled out the next morning, it would be replaced for the next visitor.

Each of us heated up his own food. Aluminum foil is the best way to cook up any kind of canned food except fruit, of course. A square of foil about 14 or 16 inches is about right. The food is deposited in the center. All four corners are pulled together and wound up tight. That makes something shaped like a ball with a handle. It is placed in hot coals, or at the edge of the fire. Soon the ball will start to bulge. The moisture in the food turns to steam. In five minutes or less, there you are, a piping hot meal.

Darwin and I fared pretty well. After supper the fire was stoked up pretty good because the weather was cooling off. Now to find a spot where we could stretch out and maybe get some sleep. It was 2 a.m. Daylight

wasn't too far off.

As I mentioned, and 8x10 foot canvas pack cover was added to the top of my pack. I took it and spread the white cover out on the shelter floor, next to the fire. I sat down and prepared to fold it over me so as to have a wind break. There stood Darwin and Snoopy looking at me. Talk about a guilty feeling. Well, to make a simple statement, I figured that if Darwin laid down on one end and me the other, we would grab hold of the edge, and roll toward each other. I wound up on my left side, I guess because I wasn't quite as big around as Darwin was. He wound up flat on his back. Snoopy took up his abode at our feet, curled up in a black ball.

It wasn't too bad for the first 20 minutes or half an hour. But when I wanted to shift my body, it was a mistake. I couldn't roll toward Darwin. It was like sleeping next to a log, and just about as movable. If I rolled the other way, he took up the slack, and I had to do without part of my cover. So I just lay there, got numb where the small pebbles were under me, and listened to Darwin snore.

I do believe the man fell asleep immediately. He never let up until daylight started to reveal tall trees silhouetted against the sky. I unrolled myself and limbered up by stoking up the fire. Snoopy put the go to a couple squirrels fooling around our camp. Darwin unwound himself and allowed that he got a pretty good nap, what little there was of it.

We fixed ourselves a "C" ration breakfast, put the fire dead out, rebuilt our fire packs, and headed out again into the tall and uncut, searching for a forest killer. Snoopy was full of life. I shared my breakfast with the little dog.

The storm was a wet one. It was slick going as we walked through the brush fields. But by now a compass shot from Wickiup Shelter should lead us right to our fire. Up ahead was a brush-covered knoll. Maybe if we could make it up through the tangle something could be sighted to the west.

Snoopy Dog didn't have near as much trouble working his way around. A couple times I was three or four feet off the ground climbing through bigger stems. Soon we came to a patch of what we call Slick Leaf, or Snow Brush. It lay fairly flat on the hillside and was hard to stand up on. We trudged along looking, not saying a thing. Suddenly I heard a noise that's hard to describe. It was like a sickening thud, and the twang of a crosscut saw.

I looked around and there lay Darwin, flat on his back, looking toward the sky. The crosscut saw was a few feet away laying on its side. Again he looked for a place to spit before any comments were made. It was quite a

strain, but I managed to stifle a laugh. The expression on the rugged man's face, and the way he looked just about did it.

About the time we got under way again, I fell. Seemed like my body was dropping for five minutes. The fire pack broke my fall, but the radio landed in my middle. Darwin's comment was, "It's kinda hard to find footin', ain't it?"

He took one more dirty spill. That time the six foot crosscut saw twanged a little longer. I'll never forget the way Darwin looked back and forth for a place to spit because the only way was up. I fell a couple more times before we reached open timber once more.

The reason two experienced woodsmen fell so much was the big-stemmed brush under foot is held down by heavy snow pack all winter. In the spring during melt off time, it slides down the steeper slopes, flattening out the Slick Leaf species. During growing season, numerous sprouts stand straight up and hide what lays on the ground. When we put our weight on the bigger limbs we would slide down aways because they were wet and slick. Most of the times we were able to prevent falling clear down. But, sometimes it was impossible to avoid a crash fall.

Boy, was it ever nice to finally get into open going again. We were in a tall stand of old growth timber. Somehow a wide stand of timber didn't get burned out because it extended out into the Sam Creek burn quite aways.

It was amazing the amount of wildlife that were in that area. Right away Darwin noticed bear sign, and he wasn't a little one either. A herd of deer, around nine head, split and headed off two different directions. There were grouse, two or three pileated woodpeckers, and several other species of feathered fowl. But there were no spotted owls.

We were in the timber, trudging along, sniffing and gawking around. Soon there was something that smelled like the inside of a smokehouse where meat was curing. We spread out about a hundred yards apart and sure enough, over next to the hill was the remains of a green Doug Fir tree that had been struck by lightning.

A large portion of the tree trunk had been split down the center, and had burned for awhile. The next storm put down a lot of water, and we could see evidence of hail about marble size. There were chunks, large and small, scattered a hundred yards in every direction. But, there was no fire or hot spots anywhere on the burned wood. There was just a small amount of steam coming from the wood that was burning, and that was what Rustler Peak had seen.

Darwin and I cleared off a wide place and rounded up some dry limbs.

It was plentiful if a feller knew where to look. The best place to look for dry fuel is next to a standing tree. The small limbs and sometimes moss is dry, even in the dead of winter.

We each came back with an armload of wood. Darwin cheated a little and used a paste board box that held "C" rations, tore it up in strips, and started the fire. Our wood took hold, and before long we were enjoying another fire pack meal, such as it was.

I had called Rustler Peak and told them what we found. In fact, the sun shined through the cloud cover just enough to flash them with my mirror. They said the blinding reflection came right down their azimuth to the fire.

Our instructions were to stay there and keep watch until dark. To us, that was a bunch of baloney. It was just past 1 p.m., and there sure wasn't any sense in trying to find our way out of this mess in the dark.

Darwin and I went in separate directions and examined every large chunk of the tree. There was absolutely no fire left anywhere. Our cooking fire was spaded in to the wet soil and everything was just as secure as could be. We left the lightning strike at 2 p.m., and kept our mouths shut about it.

This time a compass wasn't necessary. Rustler Peak was in plain view, and a couple other landmarks showed up real good. Before we realized it the Parker Meadows Road showed up through the trees. A Forest Service rig went sailing by in a cloud of dust. They didn't see us.

Once back at our vehicles we latched onto some more food and got back out of sight, found a good place to build a smokeless fire, more or less, and took it easy until almost dark. In fact, I unrolled the 8x10 foot pack cover and had it all to myself. After we ate some more heated up food, Darwin used his fire pack for a pillow, stretched out and went to snoring away.

At the right time, I called Rustler Peak. They indicated that the dispatcher said it was okay to leave the fire. Rustler figured it would be a half mile walk to the road. They were mistaken. It was over a mile.

Again we played the waiting game. To walk half a mile would take maybe half an hour, and another half hour to trudge up the road to the vehicles. We allowed another ten minutes to make sure.

I called Rustler Peak and told the people we were on our way out. I would talk to them on the phone when I reached Lodgepole.

This smoke chasing episode is another true story about a couple rugged experienced woodsmen who worked together on the Rogue River National Forest for many years. One of the greatest challenges we ever had

was to head out into strange country, deep into the mysterious tall and uncut, and try to find a lightning strike. We had gone right to this one, and all it took was perseverance and common sense. No one could ever talk us into a fire. Just let us know the general direction and leave the looking up to the smoke chaser.

I, myself, have looked for many a smoke, false or real. Believe me, it's quite a thing to find a real fire, die it out alone sometimes, and make sure no one ever has to redo the job again. No matter how long I had to stay, I really made sure my fires were dead out.

Snoopy Dog...
he treed 10 Black Bear
during his 15 years life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
PORCUPINE SPRING WILD FIRE

The Rogue River National Forest used to be a wonderful place to work, but that is not true any more. It didn't make any difference what we worked at, or how long each project lasted, we gave it our all. Speaking for myself, I took a lot of pride in what I worked at. When there was a logging slash area that had to be cleaned up, every limb was piled pointing the same direction to make a tight pile. It doesn't take a bit longer to make a good pile than it does to build a sloppy one, maybe not as long. It sure burned better and was a lot less cleanup.

When I was in charge of building a temporary fence line, my men were instructed to build it as though it was going to stay there for a hundred years. It was not only easier and faster to set up, it was also much easier to tear down and roll up at the end of its use. A sloppy job on any temporary project is not only an eye sore and is a bad reflection on the Forest Service, it just doesn't do the job.

I could go on naming important annual maintenance tasks such as trails, phone lines, existing fences, etc. Another thing that I strongly believed in was to never be a clock watcher. We started early to get the show on the road and worked late. Many times an eight hour day turned out to be from nine to twelve hours, just to finish a job. Like I said, we were very proud of our accomplishments.

Of course, when there were large crews planting trees, grass seeding, and other project accomplishments, we had to adhere to an 8 to 5 schedule. That's the way it should be. But even then you never ever saw anyone come to work late, or right smack dab at 8 a.m. Everyone was always early and didn't rush away right at 5 p.m. Like one of my men told me once, "Shoot fire, I might miss out on something!"

It was the same thing fighting a forest fire. Everyone worked together and helped each other. There was no horse play at any time, but a good practical joke on an unsuspecting worker was always a good morale builder. Such was the case at a seven man fire called Porcupine Spring Wildfire that happened during the summer of 1955, on the Butte Falls District.

For forty some odd years I've watched lightning storms come and go. It made no difference whether or not I might be sent out on a blaze or if I was in charge of a fire on a district, I was always in the front row, so to speak, watching the action and pattern of every single lightning storm. (I was the Fire Control Officer on three different districts on the Rogue River National Forest, over a period of nine years.)

Once in awhile, storms do seem to have a pattern, but it cannot be depended on. As an F.C.O. on the Ashland District, I used to drive up on the

Mount Ashland ski road about halfway to watch the movement of storms.

I've watched bad storms come from the direction of Mt. Shasta, right toward me. If it kept on that course, the Ashland Watershed would really get a pounding. But most of the time a storm would bump against the Siskiyous, turn east and head north up the Cascades toward Crater Lake. That is one example.

Also it seems that there are certain areas that draw lightning: Huckleberry Mountain, Bessie Rock, and Tom and Jerry country, and a couple other areas. But actually, lightning will strike anywhere if there is a raging storm overhead, believe me.

That afternoon in 1955, a real dinger came across Fish Lake country in a northwest movement. It went back and forth as it worked its way along, gaining power as it went.

Robinson Butte went 10-7 (signed off the radio) for the duration right away and unhooked all communications and stayed on his glass-footed bed and crossed his fingers. The storm rumbled along toward Willow Prairie country, Porcupine Springs, across Indian Glades, and missed the town of Butte Falls by about a mile. It took in enough of Rustler Peak and Fredenberg Butte, a state lookout, that both those towers had to be shut down and disconnect radios and telephones. The storm ranged from three to seven or eight miles wide. It finally rumbled up against the Umpqua Divide west of Stella Mountain and Hershberger. Believe me it was a doosie. Every smoke chaser in the country made sure his toenails were trimmed short for that one.

The Walkers at Lodgepole were really excited. Even though the storm was aways west of our station there was always a chance I might get to go on a fire, I hoped.

The children loved it when they saw me coming home from one. Of course, my vest pockets and pack sack would always have what was leftover from "C" rations or other fire food. I made sure there was plenty. The first thing Don would do was run and sniff at my shirt or coat sleeves to see if I had really been on a fire. If so, my clothes smelled smoky. The other youngins enjoyed doing that too. Then came search and find while I told my family all about it.

After a storm, while we waited for some action, I always went out to the corral and whistled for my horses and mules. Each one was caught and tied and given a helping of oats.

There were also times when my big horse was saddled and two mules rigged up, ready to go. I built a special feed rack in the shade of some big Lodgepole Pine trees. Down both sides of the 3x12 foot manger was a small pole mounted to use as a hitching rail. The two mules were tied on one side, and the horse on the other. They would be ready if need be, or if nothing happened I'd unsaddle and turn them loose. That is what happened on this day.

The telephone rang and my wife hollered for me. When that happened it was usually something important. It was headquarters. The dispatcher said he was fixing to send me to a fire. It was located near a place called Porcupine Spring. The Camp 2 smoke chaser had run it down.

It was in heavy fuel, mostly down trees and rotted logs and dry brush. Lightning had struck nine different trees that were less that a foot in diameter. They were all within a 40 foot area. Each tree had a long narrow light-colored streak down the side from top to the ground, and straight as a die. Small slivers of wood and long, narrow chunks of bark were scattered everywhere. This was an easy fire.

The smoke chaser was able to follow a trail for about two miles. He saw smoke and flames about 100 yards west of the trail. Quickly he sized things up and called for more help. Four men were sent in from the ranger station, and they wanted me and the Imnaha Guard to follow. I was to pull out immediately. Boy was I ready to head out.

It was quite a distance from my station to the trail head of Porcupine Spring. The best and fastest route was to follow the Parker Meadows road to the Fish Lake road, south of Four Bit Ford. Then on to Willow Prairie, about another ten or twelve miles.

I arrived at the take-off site at 4 p.m.. Two other vehicles were parked there. The trail was dusty and there were a lot of man tracks marked with deer walking along over them.

It was early fall by now, and there were places in the country where it cooled off pretty well at night. In face, there was frost on the ground every morning at Lodgepole.

I took off down the trail with a full pack, raring to go. In less than an hour I saw smoke, and soon I was standing in the midst of five mighty dirty men. I did not walk in to take over, but, rather, to meet the Fire Boss and find out what part he wanted me to play.

The line had been completed around the one acre fire, and now the task of mop up would be quite tedious. But, they were making good progress.

The boss put me to cold trailing the line because I knew what to look for. It was a down on my hands and knees job. Carefully I felt along the burned out area. Every time my fingers felt the slightest bit of heat, the digging started. Generally it was a dry stump burning away in a pit, maybe two feet or so deep. It didn't take long to die it out, but it could very well have flamed up and caused another fire when no one was around.

I found two more burning stumps and a couple rotten tree roots that were barbecuing away underground. It took until after dark to complete my task.

Meanwhile the guard from Imnaha had arrived and was working with the rest of the mop up crew. His name was Corbit Smith. He was a big man, and a mighty hard worker. He loved to work with a crew like this. He was

certainly a morale builder.

Corbit came over to visit with me as we continued mop up. He had been about 30 minutes behind me when I came in. Said he knew who was ahead of him because the tracks were from a man who walked pigeon-toed with his right foot. My leg had been broken in a logging accident between my knee and ankle. My leg hadn't been set quite straight.

With seven men working on the fire, by 11 p.m., it was basically out. But the dispatcher in Butte Falls wanted us to stay until the next day. By now we had taken up positions around the fire to keep an eye out for hot spots that generally showed up as little tufts of smoke, and they were bound to appear. Corbit and I paired up to visit and talk about old times.

For the last hour or so there had been a slight breeze blowing from the southwest. Now it was maybe picking up to ten miles an hour gusts, and getting colder. All us fellers did a bang up job mopping up the blaze. There didn't seem to be a live coal left on the whole acre. Corbit and I were getting a little chilly. But we knew exactly what to do.

I walked over and had a talk with our boss. He was a reasonable man who only had a couple Forest Service years behind him. The guy always listened to good ideas if they sounded reasonable. And believe me, if the seven of us had to stay with this fire, Corbit and I knew what should be done. We had worked this angle before.

I told him that by one or two o'clock the dew point would be setting all around us. That is when frost starts to form if the temperature is low enough. He would have a bunch of cold men on hand unless he listened to my idea.

What Corbit and I wanted to do was build up two long piles of dead limbs and chunks well inside the fire line and get them to burning. There wouldn't be hardly any sparks, and there would be plenty of warmth for us all. He readily agreed and said, "Let's get started." I believe he dragged in more wood than anyone.

In short order there was a 20 foot long pile of dry material about four or five feet high and that wide, burning freely. Flames reached maybe ten feet high, and we all enjoyed it very much.

Corbit and I were seasoned smoke chasers and had to do something like this before. I walked out in the timber aways and brought back a chunk of wood three feet long and six to eight inches thick. I laid it on the ground fairly close to the fire, got my fire pack and emptied the contents, then put the flap or cover over the smooth barkless chunk and spread the canvas bag out. I left the canvas-backed pack board intact.

I stretched out, using the chunk for a pillow, and my body was held up from the wet ground just a little by the pack board. Then I arranged a couple other things under my knees, such as the empty five gallon rubber water bag and a couple unopened boxes of "C" rations. Boy I was ready for some shut eye. The warmth from the fire was just perfect.

I laid there for a few moments listening to my six pardners figure out a way to soak up all the heat they could. I was uncomfortable for maybe five minutes, my body turned numb at the hard spots on my bed, and then I fell into a blissful sleep.

Nearly every forest fire I've ever been on (360 in 30 years), I was so worn out and beat that I could have slept on a stack of live wildcats, and it wouldn't have fazed me. Most of the time I worked in an overhead capacity, such as Fire Boss, Safety Officer, Camp Boss, etc. But even though I was highly qualified to assume those responsibilities, when I was sent to a fire and all those positions were filled, I would look for the Fire Boss and get myself assigned to digging fire line. It made no difference to me, even though the years experience I had put me way ahead of the Squad Boss or Foreman. No one knew who I was or where I came from until the fire was dead out. I never wanted to step in and swing any weight around like many a Forester had tried to do to me. Of my 360 fires, 75% were project blazes, 10,000 to 65,000 acres each. My district job was the Fire Control Officer for many years.

Boy was I ever sleeping away. But, Corbit, who was stretched out on the other side of the fire, got cold. So did most of the other fellers. They started packing in wood and tossing it on the hot coals. Soon it got so blamed hot I swore that my clothes were starting to scorch. Then I discovered that a string on my fire pack had started to burn! And man did I ever wake up and start rolling away. Corbit, the old rascal, was finally getting thawed out, mostly because he was laughing at what happened to me. He was the one who was the cause of it all.

I loved a good trick like that. Not only was it a good joke but a high morale builder. No way could I get mad but I warned everyone to watch out, because the shoe would be on the other foot, soon as I could think of something.

We made it through until daylight. Shortly after that we all warmed up our own "C" rations and ate breakfast. Three hot beef patties set pretty good, along with some canned fruit and a few hard dry cookies.

Now here was where I had a chance to shine. I reached inside a side pocket on my fire pack and pulled out a piece of aluminum foil. Once flattened out it was maybe 30 inches long and 16 inches wide. I tore it in half and laid one chunk on a flat place. With my handy dandy key ring can opener, I cut the top from the can of 3 beef patties and dumped the contents in the center. To the other chunk of foil I added a can of little round potatoes. Carefully the corners of each square of aluminum were pulled together and twisted up to form a round container. They were placed in the edge of a bed of hot coals. It only took a couple minutes before the round ball-like cooking utensils were starting to bulge. The moisture was turning to steam. Soon, in five minutes or so, the contents of each packet was heated clear through.

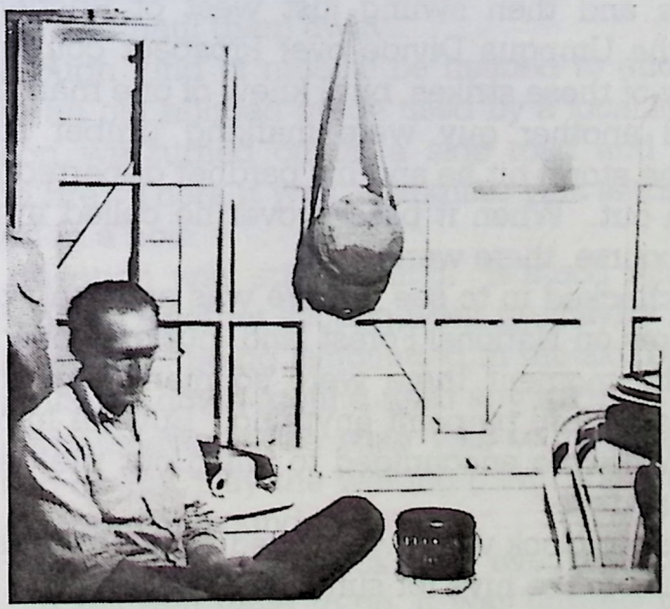
All eyes were on me as I untwisted the aluminum corners and opened

up the containers. Boy, that sure smelled good. I dipped in and made all sorts of comments about how delicious my meat and potatoes were. No one else had ever seen this done before. Corbit had cooked this way too, but he had forgotten to bring any foil. All the other men tried to heat their food in the can or ate it cold.

All in all there wasn't a single feller that hated to be there. We set to and cleaned our sleeping area up and made sure the campfire was dead out. The boss called headquarters and told the dispatcher we were on our way out. We strung out, single file, about 20 feet apart, with the boss bringing up the rear. At our vehicles we bid each other a fair ado and fanned out our separate ways. No one was hurt, a lot of fire was put dead out, and a good time was had by all.

Later, the man who was running the crew came to Lodgepole to get better acquainted with my family and I. Like I said, he was a young forester, fresh out of college you might say, and he certainly wanted to learn all he could from men of experience. I told him a lot of stories about places he should visit on the district and ask the young man to ride with me on a pack trip or two. Then we fell into a discussion about the Porcupine Spring fire.

Lightning had struck nine small trees that were close together. That was strange. But, I told him that what may have happened, one big bolt came down and turned into several tongues or laterals that were attracted to these green trees. I did not believe it was one strike right after another like he thought. It was then that I explained lightning does not strike a dry snag. It won't conduct electricity unless it was sopping wet. It hits green trees, touches off duff on the ground and burns up on the dry snag. We talked some more and he departed for home.



Days end...good job!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
CARLSON CAMP HONEY BEE FIRE

While my family and I were stationed at Lodgepole, part of my job was to chase smoke, of course, and during the years my job kept me on the Butte Falls District I got to chase a lot of smoke and helped to fight many a fire, large and small. The biggest one there at that time was 270 acres on a north slope above the Middle Fork of the Rogue River.

The first year I was off station, 1959, there was a storm came through in late spring, early summer. My friend, called Chuck, and I were marking timber one day, when a lightning storm passed over just southwest of the ranger station. Three or four fires were touched off on Obenchain Road, all on State-protected land. In fact, the Ranger turned in a fire on Beekman Hill, five miles southwest of the upstairs window of the office in Butte Falls.

Chuck and I bet that if this heat kept up he would be sent to a fire before I was. Well, that seemed like a fair deal so I took him up on it. I don't remember what the stakes were.

Marking and cruising timber sales was a neat job I had learned during the winter of 1956. A forester by the name of Andy taught me how to use a Biltmore stick to get the job done. I helped mark and cruise many million board feet of timber before I helped Chuck get a job with the Forest Service.

Anyhow, one day the lightning prediction was fairly high. A man named Bob and I were marking a sale in Section 31, sort of south and a little east of Camp Two. We were 12 miles east of the ranger station.

Bob and I watched as a lightning storm headed our way. Strikes were coming down and we could hear the rumble of thunder. It rolled in over Fredenberg Butte and then swung just west of Rustler Peak and headed straight toward the Umpqua Divide over Prospect country. Bob and I were nowhere near any of those strikes, but I knew of one man that was.

Chuck and another guy were marking timber somewhere south of Imnaha. When the storm hit he and his pardner departed for open ground and waited the storm out. When it passed over he called in to see if there were any fires, and of course, there were.

Bob and I checked in to see if there was anything pressing. There had been several strikes on National Forest land, but only one that showed up real hot. Right at the moment there were so many fog pockets in the lower elevations, it was hard to pinpoint anything. But the Imnaha timber cruisers were called in. We were encouraged to finish out the day but could be sent out on a fire before dark.

At around six o'clock when we arrived back at the ranger station, things were humming like a bee hive for sure. There was a dandy blaze going good in the Carlson Camp area, south and a little west of Rustler Peak. It was in

fairly flat country and in heavy timber. Two smoke jumpers had been dispatched to the fire from Cave Junction Jumper Base at around 4:30. It hadn't covered much ground when they arrived, but there was one tall big snag on fire and scattering hot sparks for a hundred yards. So far the ground surface was damp enough so nothing could take hold. The two rugged young men concentrated on the line around the main fire and tied the ends together in a couple hours.

They said that the big snag had been burning hot and was impossible to lay it down. Right now it appeared that it was unsafe to get anywhere near the fire for fear of the thing coming down. All they could do was keep an eye peeled for spot fires and be out of reach if it should fall.

Chuck saw me coming and came over with a big grin on his face and said, "Guess what? I get to go on the Carlson Campfire, and I've been put in charge. But I've chosen you to be my right hand man." Well, that didn't mean too much except maybe I would have to do all the work while he told me where and how. It turned out that four men would be sent in with him and I was one of the fellows he picked.

It was always exciting to be heading out toward the unknown. We didn't know exactly how to get to the fire except by map, and what was that snag going to do? And on top of that, Chuck had never been in charge of a fire crew or any other crew before.

He and I got in my Government rig and headed north. Another pickup followed along with the other three men. Enroute I coached Chuck as to what he should do.

The first thing was to get together with the man in charge and find out all about the fire. If the two men were not needed anymore, sign release papers and let them return to base. They would call headquarters and someone would come and haul them away.

It was sure enough kind of nice to be headed to another fire. The rig bumped along down an old railroad grade used by a local logging company a long time ago. Soon we turned off on a side road and went to within a hundred yards of the fire. There it was. Darkness was setting in fast because we were sort of down in a hole.

The snag in question was still burning. It stood straight up about 40 feet, then bent off center. Another section went up maybe 15 feet and angled off in the opposite direction. Being silhouetted in the sky behind, it looked as though the thing would fall down around itself any minute. It was impossible to do any mop up whatsoever. The snag was too unsafe looking to lay it down. Nothing left to do but play the waiting game and watch for spot fires. Sooner or later something was bound to happen.

Chuck was nearly a nervous wreck. He even called in and asked for advice. No one could tell him what to do. It was entirely up to him to make the next move.

He thought maybe we would take a chance and try to fall the snag. I told him to do what he wished but count me out. I was not going within reach of the snag the way it looked, because I had a wife and five youngins that needed me. The other three men agreed. We started to really get down to the business of waiting for the snag to fall.

It started to get really cold when the night air settled in. There were a couple old timers here with us, and they knew exactly what to do. So did I. Claude and Corbit found themselves a nice spot to settle down in at the far edge, inside the fire line.

There was a Cedar tree, maybe three feet in diameter, that was not damaged by the ground fire. Claude cleaned out the unburned limbs and fashioned himself a comfortable spot so as to lean back against the tree.

Corbit found another place similar to that. There was just no use running around and around the outside of the fire line looking for spot fires, because there just weren't any; the ground was too damp. Chuck was doing a lot of worrying.

I kicked around and found me a place where a rotten log had burned. The ground was still quite hot in places but nothing burning. Carefully I spaded the rest of the burned material into dirt that had been dried out by the heat. I fashioned myself a form fitting place to lay down on. After a couple changes here and there and one rock removed, it fit perfect. Casually I said good night all and stretched out for a comfortable snooze.

From the corner of my eye I saw Chuck looking us over but he never said a word. He knew that everything would turn out ok. After all, us three old-timers would snap to if anything came to life.

The fourth man was an educated Forester who was seemingly willing to learn. Gene was a good man, but a little cocky at times. He stayed close to Chuck as if he knew every move to make under such spooky circumstances. He and Chuck never rested a bit for the rest of the night. The snag finally died out except for a spot on one side at the bottom section. All it did was smoke.

Boy, did I ever sleep good. Being really tired the warm soil did my body a lot of good. Corbit would blast off with a loud snore now and then, indicating he was very relaxed and comfortable.

Claude leaned there against the Cedar tree as though his body grew there. Something woke me up once, and I happened to look toward him. For reasons unknown to me he thumped on the tree trunk with a small rock and listened with one ear next to it. I closed my eyes and drifted back to sleep. Boy, was I comfortable.

Again I awoke with a start. Chuck let out a war hoop on purpose. Said it was getting light or something, and I still think the guy was just lonesome. We rallied around and rummaged in our fire packs for breakfast. Chuck had already started a little Indian fire to warm our food over.

The forester had curled himself up next to a hot stump hole sometime during the middle of the night. For awhile we figured that Claude and Corbit might have to take hold of each end of him and yank his body out straight.

Claude was still fixing to find something to pound against the tree he had slept against all night. He picked up a Pulaski and started thumping away. The big rugged man got a surprise of all surprises.

The noise got sort of loud inside of the tree trunk. Soon Claude noticed something that was hard to believe. About a foot above his head, as he sat against the tree, a hole about two inches in diameter, started to show signs of life. Five or six honey bees came flying from their hive and made a few fast circles around Claude's head. The big man swung both arms around and stood back. By then all five of us men were looking at the hole. Claude tossed a couple rocks that slammed against the trunk, right at the hole. That dislodged several more bees. They were flying around trying to locate their tormentor.

When the sun warmed things up, dozens of honey bees started their daily routine of gathering honey. But it was really funny how Claude's head was less than a foot from the hole.

Apparently the Cedar was hollow and a Woodpecker or Flicker (Yellow Hammer) drilled a hole there to build a nest. Soon, a Queen honey bee found it and decided to start keeping house. Hence the name of this chapter, "Carlson Camp Honey Bee Fire."

Another shocker came to us right after sun up. The snag that had been in question all night long appeared to be sound. Chuck looked it over, we grabbed up a chain saw and in five minutes it was on the ground. The section that showed smoke earlier was cut out and split up. A rotten place was still hot.

In less than two hours after daylight the fire was dead out. Because of easy access we were released to depart. Chuck would take one man and return the next day for a recheck.

Of all the many fires I had worked on, this was not the worst, the work was not too hard, and there was a lot of good-natured fun. All five of us were ready, willing, and able to tackle another one.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
MOONLIGHT COLD TRAILING

The years I worked out of Lodgepole put me in a position where I could get in on the neatest happenings any man ever told stories about. There were so many major and little details before any big event would occur. And those are the things that no one ever hears about, 'cause people are too busy to tell about them or just plain don't know. So I choose to scribble down things like that. Usually they are blame near as exciting as the punch line.

During the summer of 1956, things were really humming on the Butte Falls District any direction a feller looked. We got a few fires, but nothing to write about or even hardly remember.

We had four lookouts up and watching. I supplied two of them, Devil's Peak and Bessie Rock. One drag was 18 miles and the other was 7 miles. Even though I hauled the stock a lot of miles, it was still a ten or twelve hour day, but only eight of those hours showed up on my paycheck. I could have cared less, because the job seemed to be made for me. I could do something that most people couldn't do, and on top of that, no one else even wanted the job.

Starting on Monday morning during the month of August the Boss wanted me to take a two mule load of dynamite and 100 blasting caps to the powder magazine at Heather Ponds. There was a seven man trail crew working on a new stretch of trail that runs from the saddle where the Seven Lakes Trail crosses over. It was being built on the east, lower slopes of Venus, Jupiter, and Lucifer Mountains. It would tie into the Pacific Crest Trail in the Saddle between Devil's Peak and Shale Butte.

The crew would meet me at the trail head with 400 pounds of plastic dynamite and caps at around 8 o'clock. The material was packed in 25 pound canvas bags, sort of like small pack sacks. Four of these were put in narrow paste board boxes. I would put four boxes on each mule, 100 pounds on a side.

Normally each mule wouldn't pack much more than 180 pounds, but these loads were not very wide and were perfectly balanced. The 100 caps were rolled up in my jacket and tied on behind my riding saddle.

The trip in that day was flawless, even though there was an extra mule loaded with food tagging along behind. My boss was the only one outside myself who was a licensed blaster. I had to carry a card in order to haul any blasting material either in a vehicle or on a pack mule. This man knew what to do the safest way.

The next day two mules and I would make a drag into Bessie Rock with mail and food. The Boss told me to stick around up there long enough to watch for blasting up on the trail. The Lookout would be able to look right in

on where the action was. He should keep a steady watch in case a fire got started. They had planned to start work early Tuesday morning.

It was a strange feeling, but for some reason I arrived back at my station early. We ate supper and I asked my family if they would like to drive to Imnaha. What was running through my mind was if my saddle horses and mules were already at Imnaha it would save me a lot of time the next day if my trip to Bessie started at that station, even though I did have a truck to haul the critters in.

Of course everyone was glad to line out for parts unknown. They would haul the pack saddles and rigging in a two-wheel trailer. It was only five miles by trail and eight miles by road to Imnaha. I bet the children I could get there before they did. Boy did that cause a lot of coaching from each one.

Just for fun I left Lodgepole in a cloud of dust heading north. The mules loved it. They knew where we were headed. But after we got out of sight my horse settled down to a normal fast walk.

The South Fork of Rogue River was the first stream to cross. Switch backs in the trail went down a steep hill to the river for a quarter of a mile. This year the crossing had to be up river about 100 feet from where last year's crossing was. It had washed out and left a deep pool, maybe 60 feet long and half that wide. I always liked to play tricks on my mules, like spooking them or I would try to run off and hide somewhere.

Tom mule was ahead, I don't remember how come, and Dillon trailed along behind. I got to thinking maybe I could have me some fun. Tom came trotting up to the bank where the old crossing was and hesitated. At that moment I spurred up and my horse dashed forward.

Poor Tom didn't think fast enough to make a right angle turn up river. He spooked and jumped out as far as the big black mule could. I sat and watched in amazement. Tom disappeared beneath the surface.

I could see the big black body pounding the water with his front legs and moving toward the far bank. He gained footing and left the river almost as fast as he went in, turned quickly, and looked back at me.

Dillon followed my saddle horse across a much shallower place and walked over to stand beside Tom. Water was dripping from his body. He came in a little closer, turned sideways, and shook himself violently. All one side of Dillon and I got wet.

Before we arrived at Imnaha I managed to spook him once more where Wallow and Imnaha Creeks came together. He didn't go under there. I was just riding up the trail toward the station and saw dust raise up from the road. If I hadn't been playing games with my mules I would have won the bet.

We left the two-wheeled trailer at Imnaha and idled on back to our station. En route the youngins counted 15 deer, including does, bucks, and tow-heads, lots of cottontail rabbits, two porcupines, and several little shrews, a mouse-like little guy, only smaller and a lot faster. A night drive in the forest

was always a fun time for the Walkers.

While we were gone someone came up from Butte Falls and left all the supplies that went in to Bessie Rock. I really appreciated their help. They were put inside the mouse proof saddle room at the barn. There was a note on the door knob at the house. Before bed time I went to the barn and filled pack boxes with food and other items. Now all there was left to do was put them on the truck and head out the next morning.

Five o'clock came along much too fast, but such was the life of a packer (mule skinner). Breakfast was prepared, and I put a can of soup in my saddle bags. I would borrow a small kettle and a can of water, stir the soup in, and that would be lunch for me.

It was still dark as the big truck rattled over the cattle guard. My dog, Snoopy, was wide awake and looking for movements up ahead. Imnaha was all lit up when the rig rounded the turn toward the barn. Tom and Dillon came running to greet me.

Within an hour I was loaded and on my way north toward Bessie Rock. It was a mile or so across Fools Creek Burn. The dusty trail was full of animal tracks. Hazel Nut Brush was bristling with nut pods. Thimbleberries were ripe. I could reach down a pick a few as I rode along.

From the top of a ridge down to the Middle Fork of Rogue River was more than a mile. A couple places were marshy, wet areas. Eight foot poles were cut and laid side-by-side to form a bridge-like crossing. One of these places was about 130 feet long. It made a perfect trail. The poles would never rot because they were water soaked all the time. It was called a "puncheon bridge".

From Lodgepole to Bessie Rock there were two forks of the Rogue River to cross and numerous swift water streams. They were all alive with native trout. Many of the streams were also stocked with Eastern Brook trout, a very hearty fish. The last creek crossing was Bessie Creek itself. Then it was a three mile drag up to the lookout.

The man on top of the huge basalt pinnacle was glad to see me. From the ground to the floor of the house was 110 feet. There was a 96 foot ladder with the longest span of 56 feet. Believe me, the first time I ever climbed that ladder I blame near scraped all the buttons off my shirt.

It took almost an hour to crank the winch that hauled his food and supplies to the top. We visited and talked about his job as a lookout and the role he played. Devil's Peak was a critical area that he needed to keep an eye on. I enjoyed a bowl of hot soup as I pointed out where to expect to see quite a bit of blasting for the next few days.

It would be mighty important for him to scan the area several times a day. A fire could take off even after the crew quit for the evening. While we talked I saw a big puff of gray dust and smoke at the base of Venus. Soon a distant "boom" was audible.

During my stay there were three more blasts. With that, I figured the man had a pretty good idea of what was expected of him. He must be watching that area more than any other part of the country while the trail crew was blasting.

While I was there several things came to my attention. There was a stack of magazines shoved under the edge of his bed that my mules never hauled in. I dropped a pencil on the floor near the fire finder. In reaching down to latch onto it, I noticed two tall, dark-colored half gallon jugs sitting on a shelf back out of sight. Anyone walking around in the room would never see them. But, when I raised up with pencil in hand, I caught a glimpse of the wine cache.

We were not allowed to pack alcohol of any kind in the pack string. I never said a thing, nor did the Boss ever find out from me. By all the extra things that came to my attention, it was perfectly evident that our man on Bessie Rock had been away from the station without permission. The Forest Service insisted that every time anyone left their station they must request permission. Or after hours, they must let someone know time of departure and estimated time of return, for safety and security reasons, especially Bessie Rock. Up there a feller wasn't allowed a second chance if he should fall from the ladder or off the cat walk. On the north side a man would fall almost 500 feet before he touched a thing. Sure was no place for a sleep walker to live!

The trip down the mountain to my truck was uneventful. A few Huckleberries were starting to come along, a little later there would be a bumper crop on the east slope from the Rock.

The next day, Wednesday, a trail maintenance crew had to be moved about ten miles south from Lucky Camp, down the Pacific Crest, to rebuild a bridge across Honeymoon Creek. It would be a long day because of having to back track to reach my truck at Lucky Camp trail head. I didn't mind. The three mules would be traveling empty except for one ten mile stretch with maybe 160 pounds each.

Wednesday morning my truck rolled along up the Lodgepole driveway burning headlights. It was just after 6 a.m. En route to Lucky Camp trail head I would park at the same place as the day before. Lucky Camp trail took off a mile or more up the Bessie Rock trail. I would be riding into camp by 9 a.m. It was going to be a beautiful day.

At the junction there is a spring where the lookout got his drinking and cooking water. Usually he would make the four mile trip every other day after hours. The water was carried in a pack sack sort of thing that held at least five gallons of water. One day, about half way back to his station he came to a downed tree that was maybe five foot through at the butt. It looked like a good place to rest. In order to get the weight off, he backed up to the tree and let the water sit on top. It made a scraping, shuffling sound when he did so. About then the young man got a surprise of his life.

Just on the other side of the tree was a yearling black bear, sitting on his haunches enjoying a feast of Huckleberries. The second the poor animal saw that awful-looking thing apparently coming toward him from above, he let out a squall and headed out for parts unknown. The man from the lookout was equally frightened. Said the yearling bear looked like a black wheel ripping speedily through the Huckleberry brush and never lost speed until he was about 60 feet up a White Fir tree, stopped and looked down at his tormentor.

From the spring to Lucky Camp was a six mile drag. It didn't take long because there were no adverse hills in route. I could travel maybe five or six miles an hour.

The trail crew had everything torn down and ready to pack up. In less than an hour we were headed for the Pacific Crest Trail (formerly the Old Oregon Skyline). The three men went on ahead and would meet me at Honeymoon Camp.

It was a nice trip riding across the Oregon Desert. It was one of my favorite areas on the Cascade Divide, mostly flat country with a few short cliff-like rock out-croppings, big Lodgepole pines, and nothing.

About a mile north of the trail junction to McKie is a level area of maybe 30 or 40 acres in size. Big Lodgepole pine and a few Mountain Hemlock are sparsely scattered around. At one sight along the trail here is a place where I have seen a huge dome-shaped snow drift that hangs in there until the middle of July or longer, depending on winter snow pack. I have seen the drift when it was 60 or 70 feet across the bottom with the center 30 feet deep, and frozen solid.

Every time I made a drag along this stretch my mules would run right up on top of the white bowl-shaped drift and eat a great big mouthful of snow. This year the drift was nearly gone.

The trail crew had taken a short cut or two cross country and were waiting for me at Honeymoon Creek. They would be all set up in the timber, back aways from the meadow.

I was unloading my mules and heard a muffled "boom". The construction crew up on the ridge had touched off another blast. I brought the maintenance crew up to date on current events.

On my way back across the Oregon Desert I turned off toward McKie. I saw several head of big black Galloway cattle grazing, and also seven head of elk nearby. McKie is at a four way junction of Mudjekeewis, a cut-off to the Pacific Crest, Solace, and the Tom and Jerry trails. The Tom and Jerry would take me right back to my truck.

My three mules and saddle horse covered a lot of real estate before we reached Lodgepole again. I had pulled out from there using head lights and had to back up to the loading ramp with the reflection of the truck tail lights on a pole fence nearby to tell where the truck wheels were. It was 9:30 p.m.

There wasn't any message from headquarters. But the next day,

Thursday, I had to drive to Butte Falls and out the Fish Lake road about 12 miles to the powder magazine for another 400 pounds of dynamite and 100 electric blasting caps. My critters and I would be spending Thursday night with the crew. Seemed like another mighty short sleeping night. But sooner or later there would be time to spend with my wife and youngins.

The only reason to stop by the Ranger Station was to pick up a special key to unlock the massive door to the building where the dynamite was stored. The dynamite house was made of logs over a foot in diameter with lumber inside. Between the logs and lumber was an eight inch space filled with sawdust for insulation. The roof was of a double construction, covered with brown-colored metal.

The blasting caps were located in a special metal vault-like thing one hundred yards away from the powder magazine. The blasting powder was in soft, plastic-like bars. A canvas tarp was doubled several times to form a padding to wrap the four powder boxes in. The electric caps were transported in an insulated metal box and hauled on the floor boards of the truck. I couldn't help but be a little jumpy hauling this stuff, especially during hunting season, saying nothing about cargoing the blasting material on the mules.

Back at Lodgepole I loaded three mules and my saddle horse on the truck. The dynamite was put inside four leather-faced canvas pack bags. Three bales of hay were added, and away we went. Wouldn't see my family until the next day, around 1 p.m. Friday.

While I was having all the fun, things were really going to pot at Heather Ponds trail camp. The crew cook rolled from his bed before daylight Thursday morning to get things cooking for breakfast. It was really dark, but he could smell smoke, real dense smoke. He started waking up the others.

Up on the side of the hill, just north of a big rock slide, they could see the flame. Just as the crew came to life a fire crowned out in a thick grove of moss-covered Shasta Fir trees. There were rotten trees laying from the partly finished trail clear back to the foot of Juniper Mountain, about 200 feet away. About an acre looked almost red hot.

The Boss called three different lookouts. There was no answer. Someone had turned their volume way down or clear off. There was no time to waste. All eight men headed up toward the fire with various fire tools to try and corner the blaze before it headed toward the saddle between Jupiter and Lucifer Mountains. It had gotten a dandy start.

Even though there was a man on scene for three hours after the last blast on Thursday, somewhere there was one little spark holding fire that went unnoticed. The humidity was low and soon a breeze brought it to life. Now the whole canyon was full of smoke.

The men did not get a chance to eat breakfast but there was not a griper in the whole bunch. Around 8 a.m., the Boss tried to call someone on the radio again and discovered that the unit had been left on and the batteries

were run down. What a mess! But at least Bessie Rock could see the fire and turn it in. He was the only one in three who could see it, because the smoke stayed low and drifted out over Alta Lake below the ridge tops.

Finally half the crew went down to camp for a bite to eat. It looked like it was fixing to be a long day. Soon they returned to the fire and took over while the other four went down to camp to eat something. There was no sign of any help coming their way.

There was a fire line dug out all the way around the fire by 11 a.m., some places pretty deep and wide. The size of the burned off area was less than half of what the men originally thought, less than half an acre.

The Boss was really boiling because Bessie Rock hadn't turned in their fire. He knew that if the guy had been looking that direction at all he could have seen it.

As for me, I arrived at Frog Lake around 3 p.m. I never saw or smelled any smoke yet. But, just before I reached the summit where the new trail started, there it was, not very thick now, just mostly the smell.

My first thought was, boy, the crew must really have a good campfire going, but it was still shy of 5 p.m. But when I rode into camp all eight men were there. The Boss was just drying his face on a big towel as I rode up. He peered out over the top of the folded goods and said, "Where in the world have you been?"

His face was bloated and eyelids heavy. At first I thought he had gotten into a nest of yellow jackets. The whole crew really looked terrible.

Lucky the dynamite and cases and caps were already unloaded and stored in their proper places. The other mule was unloaded. I pulled the saddles and watered the critters from the lower pond. After every little detail was taken care of I went into the living quarters of camp and faced eight tired and weary men who were slowly eating supper. The cook dished me up a plate of grub and poured a cup of coffee to rinse it down with.

Right about then it seemed like I was getting a third degree or something. The Boss asked the first question. "Was you over to Bessie Rock yesterday?" Sure was, and stayed on top for three solid hours.

"Did you tell him what was going on over here?" Of course I did. He and I watched, saw and heard, five different explosions. Plain as could be.

"Did you impress on him how important he was at a time like this?" Well, right about now I intended to get something off my back. I stood up and put my right foot up on a block of wood, spurs jingling, and got real loud about what I was saying. I told the Boss and his men exactly what took place at Bessie the day I was there.

I carried a set of field glasses and of course the lookout man had a set. Right after I saw the first blast and heard it, the other four were observed with field glasses, 8 power type. I told him that one of those blasts could very well start a fire that could go undetected after the watchman left. From then on it

would be up to Bessie Rock to detect a smoke. But he wasn't looking. I wondered what the guy thought he was there for.

After my guest appearance the Boss and his men were satisfied that I was in the clear. From here on, lookout, Mr. Bessie Rock, the boss has got your number. I wouldn't even want to be around when the two got together.

The fire was well mopped up. But someone should make one more check around the line and through the fire before dark. Compared to the other men, I was the freshest one, and told the Boss he should get some rest. I would go up and check things out, but I planned on riding my horse up that hill. He knew me well enough by now to know for sure I was serious. There were plenty of tools to use on site.

My saddle mare was nearly pure white. She was half Arabian. She carried me out through the timber and up on the trail like she was looking for excitement. Her name was Molly.

It was an hour before dark. I tied Molly to a small Hemlock tree by the trail and hung my chaps and spurs over the saddle horn and went to work. The fire looked dead out, but a feller never knows.

My best bet would be to cold trail the fire line. That's where a fire fighter gets down into the ashes and dirt and feels his way along with bare hands. That's the only way to locate hot spots. Carefully I sifted through every bit of burned out material all the way around. Just a few feet from where I started, the ends of my fingers on my right hand came into contact with a hot root. I never touched it, just felt the heat. It took maybe five minutes to dig it out and put the culprit to sleep. It was slowly getting dark.

As I stood near Molly and put on my chaps and spurs, I looked toward Bessie Rock. He was certainly lit up like both Coleman lanterns were lighted. Maybe he was having a party, hard telling. Anyhow, I would hate to be in his shoes when the Boss rode over there for a visit.

Molly stood still just long enough for me to get up. It seemed sort of silly to ride back to camp. Besides that, everyone would be sound asleep. My white mare and I dropped down aways and cut around the hill until we reached the Devil's Peak trail. It was steep in places, but soon we came to the saddle between Devil's Peak and Shale Butte. My original idea was to ride on up to the lookout and check things over. No one had been there for a week now. The man on duty had to pull up stakes and get things organized for school. On high fire danger days one of the trail crew would man the lookout.

It was really dark now, but east of us the sky was getting lighter. Wouldn't be but a little while until the moon came up. It would be a sight to see. I left the trail and rode up the ridge toward Shale Butte. There was a plateau-like spot where Molly could stand. We faced east. The sky gradually got lighter. Soon it was nearly like it was about to be sun up.

As we watched, the edge of the moon appeared over the horizon. Silhouetted between us and the heavenly body was a long jagged stretch of

lava rocks standing on end. They were from three to eight feet tall with spaces in between, like monuments.

The moon put me in mind of a massive ball of fire that I could just see the outer edge of at first. Slowly it got higher as though it was drifting up from a huge hole in the earth.

I could hear night noises made by birds and animals starting to get a little louder. There were two pair of Great Horned Owls that were out on their night hunt. One pair was south of me, near Luther Mountain, and another pair were down on the Seven Lakes Basin side. But, I never did hear or see a Spotted Owl, ever.

As the moon rose higher everything in front of us was black shadows. To look the opposite direction the area was bathed in bright moonlight. There was a slight breeze rustling the tree tops and branches.

From where Molly and I were, there was a deep canyon on each side. It looked like massive, bottomless pits. But, down there in the darkness was a shuffling noise and a small rock slide. Maybe a bear pawing around looking for something to eat.

Out in front of me was Lee's Peak. Boy, it would have been a perfect setting if only a big Timber Wolf would have walked into view and cut loose with a mournful howl at the moon. There was a band of coyotes started yipping down in the Sky Lakes Country.

I sat there on Molly and she appeared nervous and just as excited as I was. The moon rose higher and everything was lightening up except the deep black canyons below. Soon, I had to depart from the beautiful scene and head back to camp.

Slowly Molly descended the ridge back to the trail. With one more look at everything that was splashed with moonlight, Molly and I dropped off down the side of the mountain, following a trail I could not see. It was truly like a bottomless pit, but she picked her way along over and through the rocks and limbs.

Soon a mule cut loose and brayed down ahead, and Molly answered. I rode into camp, unsaddled and watered Molly at the lower pond. With a helping of oats and part of a bale of hay, I patted her on the neck and headed for my bed roll. No one heard me when I rode in, but boy, were these guys doing a lot of snoring. My bed roll felt so cozy. Sleep took over the moment my head hit the pillow.

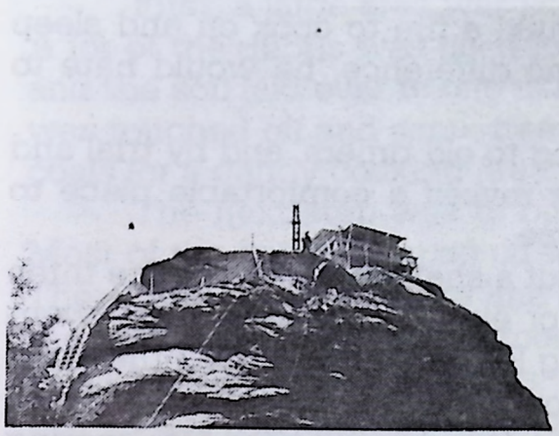
Before I departed the next day the Boss got together with me to talk about our Bessie Rock Lookout man. My personal opinion was not in his favor, but I never told about the jugs of wine and magazines I saw. The guy was already in trouble enough to lose his job. Right now I would ride out of here and round up some radio batteries and bring them in early the next day.

The mules followed along behind as Molly ambled along toward home. I went to sleep a couple times, but she would stumble a little and wake me up.

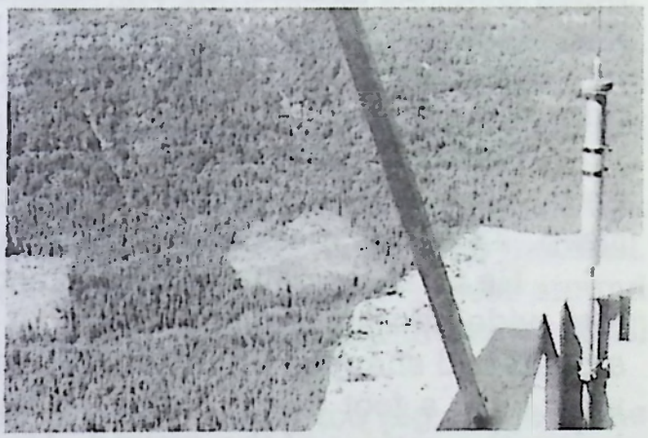
Last night was one of the most beautiful rides a man could ever hope for.

The hot spot I dug out that night was the last bit of life in the Heather Ponds blaster's fire. As for the Bessie Rock man, the Boss rode to the lookout alone, and he followed him down the trail to the trail head. He was canned on the spot. The following Monday I cargoed the belongings of a new man to take his place and hauled out the other guy's personal things. There were no more blasting fires the rest of the season.

Things were like a beehive around Lodgepole. We were going to get a day off to go to Medford. Boy, that would be fun for the wife and children, but for an old mule skinner like me, I just wasn't too sure.



Bessie Rock Lookout.



View of Red Blanket Cr. clearcuts.

Bessie Rock Lookout.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
SNOW FIRE ON LUTHER MOUNTAIN

It is truly a shame that the old time smoke chasers hardly exist in these parts any more. All he would need was an azimuth to follow with his compass and a landmark or two. He was able to head out, rain or shine, daylight or dark, and loved every minute of it. I can speak this way because of many years of smoke chasing experience behind me.

What is the best challenge of all is to be dispatched to a fire, somewhere out there in the tall and uncut, and keep going until a fire is found. If the going gets too unsafe, an old smoke chaser will hole up until daylight and keep looking. He knows where and how to build a fire to cook on and sleep by. The bare ground is his bed, but makes no difference, he would hate to miss being there.

I learned how to chase smoke by listening to old timers, and by trial and error. One time it seemed only natural to fix myself a comfortable place to sleep. This time there was another man with me.

He fixed himself a nice bed by digging out a shallow trench maybe three feet wide and six feet or so long. It was six or eight inches deep. He went around and snapped off the ends of green Doug Fir boughs and lined the ditch to at least a foot deep. When he laid down on it the bed smashed down to below the surface of the ground. He slept like a log. I could hear him snoring most of the night.

Being a green horn I figured there was even a better way to fix me a bed. I cut a tall, live tree, ten inches in diameter and sawed two logs from the butt, 7 feet long. By dragging the two small logs into place and spacing them four feet apart, it looked like the start of a masterpiece. Then I cut boughs from the tree at hand and laid the springiest branches across the poles. The last four inch layer was the small fluffy Doug Fir branches.

Before hitting the hay, (branches) more fuel was added to our warming fire. My body fit between the two poles perfect. To lay there on such a nice soft bed, looking at the stars between the tree tops, was my idea of living right. If this is the life of a smoke chaser, that's for me.

The wind came up some, and the weather was cooling off on the south slopes of Rustler Peak. It was 10 p.m. My pardner was snoring away. Soon my body started getting cold. No matter how I turned or laid there, it was simply getting unbearable. What happened was the cold night air was blowing beneath me between the poles. It was like sleeping on so much screen wire. My idea didn't work.

I climbed from my fancy fir bough bed and yanked the poles away so the branches would lay flat on the ground. After the fire was stoked up again another attempt was made to get some sleep. It worked real good, but was a

little harder to lay on.

One of my favorite and most used methods of sleeping on the ground was learned by trial, error, and just plain logic and common sense.

One night the going really got touchy, even with a good flashlight. I always carried an extra one too. But, there are times it gets plumb foolish to travel on foot at night.

I never had to worry about rattlesnakes, just yellow jackets and bald hornets. Not too much of a problem if a feller was careful.

I located a small opening between some huge Doug Firs. The lower limbs were quite aways above the ground. And there was nothing that was apt to fall on me while I slept.

First, a large area was scraped off near the center of the 40 foot opening. A lot of the debris was used for fuel. A hole was dug down a foot or so deep, and the soil laid over to one side. It would be put back in later. A hot little fire was touched off and some tree bark added. The heavy bark would turn to hot coals for a dandy cooking fire.

The next step was to build a fire at least six feet long and 3 feet wide. Most of the stuff I scraped off to reach bare soil, was used as burning material. There was a two foot fire line scraped out down to mineral soil, clear around the camp site for safety. It took about a half hour or forty five minutes to do all of the above mentioned items.

Fuel was added to the long, narrow fire that wasn't too big. It gave me plenty of light to cook by. The hot coals in the bottom of the hole were perfect for heating up C rations. A couple on three 14 inch squares of aluminum foil worked perfect.

A can of beef patties in one, a can of pork and beans and meat balls and spaghetti in number two and three. Pull the four corners of each chunk together and twist them up. Lay each package around the edge of the hole and watch.

Soon they would start to puff up and in five minutes or so a hot meal was ready to enjoy. When I left my camp the next morning, my cooking utensils were left behind, buried in the fire hole. After supper, my long narrow fire would be pretty well ready for the second phase. But first I rounded up some large chunks to stock on my cooking fire. It would burn along all night.

My shovel from the fire pack came in handy for things other than fighting fire. While the long, narrow fire burned, the soil was heated down several inches. I set to, spading the remaining coals and burned material into the loose soil. After that the back of the shovel was used to make a form-fitting bed, pillow and all. I'll tell you what, when a man is tired, a place to sleep like that was right next to perfect. The first time I built a bed like that was a pattern for many times ahead during my smoke chasing years working for the US Forest Service.

During the 31 years on the Rogue River Forest, I had the pleasure of

working with and knowing many of these rugged men. They told stories about certain escapades that are worth writing about. One of these times took place right on top of Luther Mountain on the South Cascade Range.

If you are on Devil's Peak or standing in the saddle between Shale Butte and Devil's Peak, look south and maybe a little west. You will see a high dome-shaped mountain right on the divide. It sits to the left of the Pacific Crest Trail.

In 1954, a lightning storm came whipping up the Cascade Range, just knocking the tar out of everything in its path, either by lightning or hail. A two man trail crew was camped at Hemlock Lake on the west slopes about three miles from Luther Mountain. They were a dandy team by the names of Corbit and Harold.

It really hailed long and hard at their camp, but their heavy canvas tent didn't leak. Said there was hail stones a foot deep in places where it came downhill. The storm came over just before dark and again before daylight.

Next morning the two men ate breakfast and prepared for another day of trail maintenance down on the Sky Lakes side, northeast and east of Luther Mountain. It was procedure to call Rustler Peak at 8 a.m., every morning, and also at 8 p.m. before bedtime. There were times when they called other stations, depending on their location.

At 8 a.m. that morning their plans were changed. Harold told me later that he couldn't figure out if it was for better or worse. They learned that Butte Falls District got five fires, but nothing real serious unless it turned off hot and dry. Then anything can happen.

One of those fires was blazing away on the dome of Luther Mountain, and the Boss wanted Harold and Corbit to go look it over. That could be a beaner of a fire to climb up to. Rustler called headquarters and told the dispatcher, the two man trail crew was on their way.

On the ridge above Hemlock Lake was where the Pacific Crest would be routed some day, and also a side trail down to the Lake. But, for now it was a cross country walk to reach the ridge. Soon the two men could see the fire. Man, what a drag that was going to be. At the bottom of the mountain they sized things up and decided against packing a power saw up there. If it was really needed, Harold would come back and get it. (That was in the days when power equipment could be used in the high country)

From a distance, it appeared that the fire was on the ground. Apparently a green tree was struck and the top ¾ was knocked down. They could see flames. The two old fire horses went up the southwest side of Luther Mountain just like a couple mules would do. A mule always zigzags back and forth as though they were following switch backs.

Soon the fellers were on site. Man, what a view from here! Looked like Klamath Lake was right beneath them, and Rustler Peak stood out like a sore thumb. In fact, Harold took his mirror and flashed the tower.

He called Rustler and told them the story. It was all a ground fire and hadn't covered much area. The hottest spot was the three foot stump of the tree that got hit. They figured it would take a good part of the day to mop up, because it was mostly in rock cracks and between boulders. And there was no water available.

The two men started scratching around and separating burning fuel. It didn't take long for that part. What was going to be slow was the mop up down in between the rocks. Some spots it was three or four feet to where the fire smoldered away and could only be reached with a long stick.

Corbit got an idea. Maybe there was a snow drift still hanging on the north side of the mountain. While Harold pecked away at the hot coals, Corbit went searching.

In less than a half hour he came back to the top of the mountain with a pack sack almost filled with snow. The two men painstakingly sprinkled the ice crystals down on the burning embers and stirred them with long sticks. It was surprising how fast the mop up job went after they found the snow.

While the two men stopped long enough to eat their lunches, it was also time to enjoy the wonderful view. Corbit wondered how come a lookout house hadn't been built there.

Mt. Pitt towered high, a short distance away. And there were peaks and ridges they could look straight across or down at from where the two men sat. Even though Sky Lakes was below to the east and south, only one lake was visible as the sun shimmered off the surface. At that time the old Oregon Skyline Trail passed along the wide canyon bottom, past most of the lakes.

Around three o'clock in the afternoon, the fire was pronounced dead out. From where they were Harold found a spot where he could talk directly to headquarters. He told the dispatcher there really was no need to stay there for six daylight hours because of so much rock. There was just no place for a fire to travel. But they were advised to stay until at least 5 p.m.

The two old timers couldn't agree it was necessary to stay any longer. They took one more look around, picked up their tools and started working their way down the mountain.

Back at their Hemlock Lake camp, Harold and Corbit settled down for the evening. They had checked in with Rustler Peak who figured they were still on the mountain. 8 p.m. would be another check in time, the last of the day. The two men had chased smoke and died it out in an unusual way and added another chapter in the lives of smoke chasers of the tall and uncut.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
HOT SNAG DISASTER, BURNING BOOTS

A smoke chaser is a man who is ready, willing and able to tackle any forest fire that ever got started, either by lightning or man. No one ever knew what the fire was doing on the ground until he found it. But, once he was on site sizing it up, he knew if it could be handled by himself or if a crew should follow up immediately. As for my smoke chasing experience, it has been both ways many times.

The fire fighting I liked the best out there in the forest is a one man show. If luck was with me the fire would be knocked down and lined before dark, but usually it would be after midnight at least.

A good fireman takes advantage of the cool night time to do the most damage to a forest fire. The humidity rises, less chance for spot fires, and besides that, I just like to fight fire at night.

But, some of the most fun times I've ever had were when I chased smoke with someone who loved it as much as I did. When two men are together like that, neither man is the boss. They do very little talking and seldom work together. But, after it is all done, the fire is dead out. From then on its story telling time and visiting.

Usually the stories are about fighting forest fires and certain close calls and narrow escapes that occurred. Such was a story about a man named Hal who tackled a job alone on the Seven Lakes trail in the early 1950's.

An electric storm worked its way along the west slopes of the Cascade Divide. Rustler Peak kept close track of lightning strikes as it moved along in a northwest direction. It moved along just west of Frog Lake and King Spruce country, down Gopher Ridge and toward Bessie Rock. There was one of those lingering bolts of lightning latched onto a tree above the King Spruce junction. Smoke started rolling up instantly.

Rustler Peak could look right at it. In fact, along where the old Four Mile sign used to be is the only place you can see the Rustler tower from the Seven Lakes trail.

He plotted the fire out and called the dispatcher at Butte Falls Ranger Station. Meanwhile, Bessie Rock got a cross shot. It was right beside the Seven Lakes trail approximately a mile up the trail from King Spruce junction and ¼ mile down trail from the Four Mile sign. The time was 1:30 p.m.

The smoke chaser for this one lived at Lodgepole at the time. That was before I took the job. Hal was a good rider and knew how to put a pack on a mule. He rounded up a horse and mule, saddled up, and put fire fighting equipment on the mule, and headed for the fire. The mule was loaded light so he traveled along three or four miles an hour.

When Hal rode past King Spruce junction he saw the smoke. It was an

uphill grind for quite aways, then leveled off for aways. The fire was downhill from the trail about 100 on a 20% slope. Hal got down and sized things up. He called in to state his time of arrival and said he could have it under control by dark.

There was very little ground fire and a short snag about two foot in diameter would be easy enough for him to tip over. The saddle horse and mule were tied to trees up by the trail. The radio was also left there. Hal walked down to the burning snag with a six foot cross cut bucking saw.

The snag was only about twenty feet tall. Lightning had struck a small live tree right next to it. The bolt went to the ground and touched off the dry debris and in moments, fire engulfed the snag.

A slight breeze was scattering sparks around and the top part of the snag was engulfed in smoke. But, there wasn't much stuff falling to the ground.

Hal took his shovel and tossed mineral soil around the base of the snag where it was too hot to stand. He figured the best bet was to fall the snag with the cross cut bucking saw. (There are two kinds of cross cut saws that were used to fall and buck timber with. A falling saw is thinner and more narrow than a buck saw. It takes two men to fall a tree with one. A bucking saw is thicker and wide across the middle and tapers down at each end. It is, more or less, a one man saw.)

In order to cut the snag down, Hal had to start the cut at a slant instead of straight across so the saw wouldn't bend down too much as he pulled it back and forth. The saw teeth were sharp and the cut deepened fast. Besides that, Hal was a husky, rugged man.

Most of the falling ashes and small coals of fire were coming down the same direction the wind blew. The cut was getting closer to the other side of the snag. There was no undercut or no way to make one. It had to be cut straight off.

The top part of the snag was shedding a lot of smoke. It obstructed his view of two small limbs that stuck out from the live tree that lightning had hit. Hal kept cutting. But the snag wouldn't tip over. He stopped sawing to see how come. He also took a look see if any new spot fires were showing up. There were none. There was hardly any wood holding at all.

He rounded up a long dry pole and tried to push the thing down, but it wouldn't budge. After another look around he took a drink of water, picked up the saw and let it slide down into the cut, and started to pull out more shavings. It should begin to lean a little and slip from the stump and fall downhill. He couldn't see the top four feet of the burning snag. Hal kept sawing.

Suddenly, without warning, it started to go, only the wrong direction. Hal jumped to one side, tripped on a rock and fell flat. The burning snag fell across both feet and pinned him down.

The moment it landed, fire began to blaze up from the butt where it was smoldering away down inside the wood. The impact caused it to bust open a little and gave the hot flame something to catch hold on. Lucky Hal landed on his back.

He started to pull his feet free. They were jammed in between small rocks and dirt. He was able to get hold of a dry limb and start digging and prying. The flame was getting hotter and traveling up the log.

Finally, after great effort, his left foot came free, boot and all. It felt as though his right ankle was broken. Sparks were snapping and burning small holes in his clothes. Feverishly, he worked to get his right foot free. But, the boot heel was wedged solid between two rocks, and the weight of the snag was holding them tight. He had to work fast.

He got his sharp pocket knife, reached down and started cutting the leather boot lacing. The fire was so hot his clothes were starting to get singed. When the lacing was cut, the boot opened up enough so his foot could move some. With great effort and stabbing pain he placed his left foot against the burning snag and pushed and pulled at the same time. His right foot came free. The top of the sock was smoking and one shirt sleeve was burning. He crawled out of danger and shed his outer shirt.

Hal had to climb on his hands and knees to where his radio was. He turned and looked back at his trap. Black smoke was billowing up from his burning boot. From here on he was a helpless man. It was very fortunate the fire was in an opening where there was very little burnable material, but a fire line had to be put around the burned area.

Hal called Rustler Peak and told them the story. A couple men would be dispatched to the fire and no doubt spend the night there. It would be way after dark before the fire would be mopped up, and it was Forest Service policy to spend six daylight hours on a fire after the last spark was out.

Hal left all his fire tools behind, with great effort, managed to climb into the saddle on his horse and head back to Lodgepole. The mule followed along behind.

Hal's ankle wasn't broken, just badly bruised. But, as far as chasing any more smoke, that was out of the question for the rest of the season.

Smoke chasing is dangerous from the moment a man leaves his station until he returns. It may be several days in between. I have heard stories how a new trainee would drive too fast from his station to a take-off point and wreck his smoke chasing vehicle.

One fire guard was dispatched to a fire with a one ton pumper truck hauling 500 gallons of water. He entered a turn too fast. The water shifted, and the pumper went careening out through brush and tree stumps.

Smoke chasers come in contact with yellow jackets, hornets and an occasional old mama bear and her cubs. Never get between the old gal and her babies. A fire fighter isn't much good hanging onto a tree top looking

down at the dark eyes of an irate black bear. Just about spoils everything.

Men have been known to get excited and read the wrong end of a compass needle, or leave their fire pack in a trail at night and never find it again, after they climb a hill to get a better view. Two men walked away and left their two way radio where they sat down to rest. They walked for an hour before either man missed it.

But, I believe the greatest safety hazards are right at a burning fire. There are so many unpredictable things that are apt to take place. Wind shift will cause sudden blow ups. Spot fires burn uphill toward unsuspecting fire fighters, with live trees coming down and burning limbs falling to earth.

A smoke chaser's only defense is to pay attention when he is at training camp, use common sense and don't ever get excited. Think things out and stay alive.

In the Centennial Year, 1959, there was a group formed in Butte Falls called the Black Dog Bandits (Snoopy was their mascot). Here is Gordon with his gun, saddle, Snoopy and new pup, Taco, and old Smoke Chaser coupe.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
BEAR HUNTING SMOKE CHASER

During the early days of the Forest Service, many of the seasonal employees were local people. They worked on road and trail crews, recreation, and some office personnel. Of course these people were readily hired as fire lookouts, smoke chasers, and fire fighters, because they knew the country.

Most of the old timers thought nothing about knocking over a tow head (yearling deer) for camp meat. The lookouts and fire guards would kill an old barren doe (a female deer that cannot bear fawns) to supplement their food supply. They had the advantage because the meat could be put up in quart fruit jars, made into jerky, and of course, fresh venison for breakfast, dinner and supper for a few days.

It was not an approved procedure so such goings on were kept on the Q.T. I don't suppose there were any inspections to uncover such actions or not.

Deer and bear were plentiful, saying nothing about squirrels, quail, grouse, and even wild turkeys. Game of all kinds were plentiful. In fact, it was just ordinary procedure for many country folks. The meat supplemented diets of beans, potatoes, and black-eyed peas. That was one way my family lived, especially during the depression years that started in 1929. (I wrote a book called, "Beans and Backstrap", telling much of the history of country people who lived at Beagle at the north end of the Rogue River Valley during those years.)

After I started to work for the US Forest Service, Rogue River National Forest, men told me stories about such happenings. At Lodgepole Guard Station during the 1940's, a single man lived there as a smoke chaser. He and a friend of his sat in the hay barn one night with the sliding door wide open. The men put some hay and a few apples out for bait, near a salt block. Deer would come in, they would spotlight one and shoot it. Generally the mules and horses would be over in a Lodgepole Pine thicket away from the mosquitoes.

But there was one big black mule who had a good nose. He knew there was something by the salt block besides hay, and decided to sneak up for a closer look.

The two guys heard a noise nearby and got ready. After a little bit a crunching sound was quite audible. One man cocked his gun and the other one turned on the spotlight. Right in the middle of all those goodies stood one big black mule, slobbers running from both corners of his mouth, eating apples. He looked right at the light.

The spotlighters spooked the mule and he took off for parts unknown.

But in a half hour or so the old boy sneaked back for seconds. This time one of the guys got a bright idea.

Back in the saddle room was a double aught single spring jaw trap made to catch small animals like squirrels. He set the trap and baited it with a slice of apple. The man waited.

Sure enough, the same mule came back for more. Only this time He was in for a shock. They watched as the big black animal crept toward the bait. He reached down, nibbled at the slice of apple and "whack", he sprung the trap.

Poor mule reared up on his hind legs, snorted, and left the country. The trap didn't catch and hang on, but it was quite a shock being slapped on the nose like that. In a short time the mule was back again. The men gave up and quit spotlighting at the barn.

The next night they knocked over a tow-head at a rotted out Doug Fir tree stump by the woodshed. Men on back country trail crews ate deer meat. Rarely did any meat ever spoil before it was used.

During hunting season the back country crewmen always carried guns to hunt with and got their meat. As a packer I, too, carried a saddle rifle 32 special. But, as time passed, all guns were forbidden anywhere with a Forest Service employee.

One unusual incident took place that I remember well. One day toward the first of September in 1954, a lightning storm came thundering across the country, over Lodgepole, Imnaha, and toward Bessie Rock. Rustler Peak had to pull the antenna loose and turn off the telephone for the duration of the storm. I did the same thing with my phone at Lodgepole, so did Imnaha.

The man on Bessie Rock was a young college student, learning how to become a school teacher. He was a tall slim good-natured man, but didn't know straight up about country living. He was a 100% city boy.

He followed instructions as what to do if a storm came close or overhead. This was his first one. I had demonstrated, on site, what to do and when. The radio should be shut off and the antenna wire unscrewed from the set. I told him to place the end of the antenna in a coffee cup, because fire could spurt from it. Then he should either stand on the short glass-footed stool, or sit in the center of the bed that also had glass insulators on the ends of the legs. There were no springs in the mattress. Stay away from any metal.

The storm hit hard just west of him and struck a live tree on the ridge above Red Blanket Creek to the south. The ridge is the one where the rock pinnacle pushed its way up through the dirt a few thousand years ago and became known as Bessie Rock.

When the storm was in progress, static electricity traveled down the antenna wire into the heavy coffee cup. Sparks several inches long were flying. Tongues of fire licked along the metal kerosene stove and jumped back and forth on some silverware laying on the table. It turned the blade of a

butcher knife into something that resembled a saw of some kind. Scared the poor guy out of his wits.

As soon as the storm passed over he started looking around. Down the ridge about a mile, the young fire lookout spotted his first fire. It was burning in a tree top, scattering fire down the steep slope toward Red Blanket Creek. The south slope was mostly scattered rock with very little burnable material.

Carefully he sighted it in with the Osborne Fire Finder, called Headquarters, and turned it in. Bessie Rock Lookout was not only a man who looked for fire, but also could be dispatched to fight a fire. He was classified as a Lookout Fireman.

The dispatcher figured this would be a good chance for the young man to try his luck. He was sent to the fire, but an immediate follow-up would be the Imnaha smoke chaser. I'll call him Jim.

The cable car was pulled up to the top of the rock, and a new, well-maintained fire pack was loaded on. Once on the ground he put the pack on his back, picked up his Forest radio, and headed down the ridge toward the fire.

There was a well-maintained Forest trail that went right to it. The old Bandana trail went down past a good spring by the same name and went to a dead end road east of the old Svinth sawmill site. That used to be the early summer access trail to the lookout. Also, the Bandana spring is where he got drinking water first of the season.

It only took him a half hour to reach the fire. The young man called the dispatcher. Lightning had struck the top of a big old growth Douglas Fir. It peeled off quite a chunk of wood clear to the ground. Pieces were scattered far and wide. What few spot fires there were, burned uphill and went out at the edge of a lava flow.

The green tree was mostly rotten inside and really burning hot. The fireman threw dirt where he could find it but did very little good. His instructions were to keep spot fires down and be very careful until the experienced guard arrived from Imnaha.

Meanwhile, Jim got the message. He was one of the old-timers I mentioned before, and he always carried a rifle of some kind if he could, if the Ranger didn't catch up with him.

His smoke-chasing car was a four door sedan. He kept the fire pack where the rear seat used to be. For a seat cover on the front seat was a heavy durable cover that was too long and had to hang down over the back of the front seat, almost to the floor. Here is where Jim kept his rifle hid from prying eyes, because the doors had no locks.

As he headed toward the Svinth mill site he saw a cloud of dust rising in the distance behind him. He slowed a little and discovered it was a Forest Service vehicle. He thought that maybe it could be the Ranger.

He drove to the trail head, climbed out, grabbed his fire pack, and

headed toward the fire. The Government rig was still coming. He went up the trail maybe a quarter of a mile and hunkered down behind a bush to watch with his field glasses. Sure enough, it was the Ranger. He looked around the car, then opened the back door, and started snooping. He was looking for a gun. Jim held his breath as he watched. Soon, the Ranger was satisfied, slammed the doors shut, and left.

When the dust settled again, Jim went back to his car, retrieved the gun, and headed for the fire. The Ranger didn't look under the folded seat cover, or the jig would have been up.

The fire was only a mile and a half away. Jim was a tough man and walked a lot. It wouldn't take any time at all to cover the distance. There was a turn in the trail up ahead where it left the Red Blanket side of the ridge and worked its way to level ground. As Jim started around the bend there stood a good-sized black bear, at least a four year old male. Immediately Jim pulled his rifle up and shot the huge black animal. He didn't tell me where the bullet hit, but it only took one shot.

Well, from that moment on, things went from bad to worse. He couldn't leave the bear unattended. So, Jim started to dress the animal out where it lay. That wouldn't work, because the carcass wouldn't cool out good and would soon sour the meat.

Jim undid his fire pack and removed the Pulaski. (It is half axe and half hoe) Then he cut three long poles that were standing dry. He rigged up a tripod by tying the ends together. But, first, one end of each pole was sharpened so they would dig in and wouldn't slip. He placed the tied ends over the bear. But, before he did, Jim made a fast trip back down to the car for some rope stored in the trunk of the car.

He tied the animals hind feet hard and fast to the top of the tripod. Then he started raising the heavy carcass up by moving one pole at a time, until it was clear off the ground.

Quickly he gutted the bear and then cut some green sticks from a vine maple. With these the opening was spread way apart, from one end to the other. Lucky for Jim, the animal hung high and dry in a shaded area. The cool air blew up from the canyon below and cooled the meat.

Meanwhile, the new man on the fire was having quite a time. Another section of the tree had fallen to the ground and scattered fire everywhere. His hands were blistered and bleeding. Jim still hadn't showed up yet.

Back at Headquarters the Ranger told the dispatcher he followed the Imnaha Guard to the trail head and searched the car for a gun. He had seen him leave, carrying a fire pack, but no gun. Judging from that time, Jim should have been on the fire over an hour ago. When he finally showed up, the man from Bessie Rock called in and let them know. He noticed Jim's hands and clothes had blood on them.

Jim tied into the fire like an experienced man would. In a couple hours

it was well on the way to being dead out. He made a couple of trips up to the Bandana spring for two pump bags of water, five gallons at a time. Before the second one was gone the fire was out and lined.

The new fireman called in and let them know. They were released to go home, but the Bessie Rock man would return the next day to look it over. Jim made his way back down to where the bear was hanging high and dry. Lucky it was a downhill shove to the car.

It was a tough job putting a dead bear in the back of the rig, but by moving around next to a cut bank, with a lot of pulling and yanking, he got it loaded and headed for Imnaha.

I'll never know how he did it, but somehow he removed the carcass from the car and hung it from a pole put across between two trees with a set of rope blocks.

It got mighty cold that night at Imnaha. The day was Saturday. For a wonder nothing was going on too much until the telephone started ringing. It was Jim. He wanted me to come to Imnaha and give him a hand. There was a big job to do and he needed help. I called the Boss and told him where I would be on my day off.

My family and I pulled up into Imnaha yard and could hardly believe our eyes. There hung this huge black bear. All Jim wanted me to do was help skin it out before somebody came by. I felt like heading back to Lodgepole.

It was ready to cut up in an hour or so, but he wanted to hang the meat up in the shop so it would freeze good and solid that night. I was disgusted with the whole thing.

Sunday evening Jim called me and said, "I guess it will be up to you to fight the fires on this end of the District from here on, the Ranger canned me. I'll be moving out tomorrow, bear and all."

That was the last time I saw Jim until several years later. He had been doing odd jobs and said he had always been sorry he shot the bear on the way to that fire.

All the years I worked out there in the tall and uncut, I never shot any game out of season. It was my duty to set an example and even assist in apprehending poachers and rustlers. I worked with the Game Wardens and Oregon State Game and Wildlife people. In fact, before I retired, I spent several years in charge of the Range and Wildlife Program on the north end of the Rogue River National Forest. I'm glad I never had to work and chase smoke with another man as trigger happy as Jim was. It could have been a serious situation.

The next smoke chaser at Imnaha was a coach from a Medford High School. He was gun shy and didn't know much about Forest Service work, but we got along real well. He only lasted one season.

CHAPTER NINETEEN
GRAVITY SOCK ON THE AIRPLANE FIRE

For me fire fighting really got in my blood, so to speak, when I chased smoke out of Lodgepole. I was sent to a good many other fires while there.

One thing I learned real quickly was how to apply water mop up. I learned how to operate and maintain every fire pumper the Forest Service owned. Also other means of use of water, such as five gallon rubber back pack bags, tiny pumps to use water from a canteen, tanks of all sizes, and the gravity sock method.

My oldest son, Don, was four years old when we went to Lodgepole. I got him started fighting fire when he was eight years old.

In the fall of the year we started burning logging slash piles a little early. It was on a weekend and Don was with me. I had a Government pumper truck.

We had already moved down to Butte Falls so he and Tricia could go to school. We stopped by Lodgepole and fed the horses and mules. There was one place that worried me a little on the side of Rustler Peak. We had a little trouble with it, and that was the reason for the pumper.

We drove off the lookout road on to a spur that took us to a log landing. The slash pile burned hot and started limbs and other debris to burning out of bounds. Here is where I could give Don a good lesson in the proper way to mop up a fire with water.

What I wanted to stress was to use just a little water and a lot of digging and turning hot spots. And I also warned him that we would get wet and covered with dirt and ashes. I had him start digging a hot place out. I started the pumper motor and trained a stream of water into the hot ashes. It hit the shovel and splattered him good. After about five minutes of letting him get the dirty end of the deal, I took my turn at digging while Don sprayed the ashes, knowing full well what would happen.

Don got even, but he also carefully followed my instructions. In less than an hour he and I cleaned up a trouble spot that could have caused a major fire. We used maybe fifty gallons of water. But, boy did we get dirty and wet. He performed like a professional fireman. I was very proud the way my son took hold.

Several years later I became a Fire Control Officer on the Ashland District. I took Don with me every chance I got.

One day there was a storm came over the east side of Mt. Ashland, and I decided to drive up the old Ashland Loop Road to Bull Gap and go down the Tolman Creek Road aways for a view of a deep canyon below to the south, Neil Creek Watershed.

The southwest fork of Neil Creek headwaters are in the upper end of a

deep canyon. It is so deep and hidden behind Bull Gap Ridge where, if a fire took off, it would be awhile before Wagner Butte could pick it up. That was why I wanted to get a first hand look at Neil Creek Canyon.

We rounded the turn at Bull Gap and headed east on Tolman. Sure enough, right in the bottom of the canyon was a tree on fire. With the glasses it looked like a half dead Douglas Fir of fair size burning hot at the top 30 feet and sending sparks everywhere.

My job as Fire Control Officer allowed me to make snap decisions to suppress any forest fire on my District. I was an assistant for the District Ranger and reported to him what actions I took.

Here was an opportunity to show my son, Don, what it took to knock down a forest killer right before his eyes. The canyon was lined with saw timber of three or four different species, much of it was old growth. If this fire got a run on things it would wipe out an important watershed and perhaps jump over the ridge into the watershed that supplied the whole city of Ashland. This watershed also supplied much of the surrounding county plus the Talent irrigation system. Millions of board feet of timber could be saved and the agony of thousands of people could be spared if I made the right decision and made it fast.

I knew from past experience just what had to be done. I called the air tanker base at Medford and ordered a load of retardant to come to the Neil Creek drainage immediately by way of Bull Gap. I told them what kind of problem we had and what the potential was.

The lead plane got airborne and headed our way to check things out. We called it the Bird Dog plane. The twin engine plane came flying right over Bull Gap saddle going sort of southeast. He saw the burning snag directly beneath him. He made a wide pass and dropped into the canyon for a closer look. We heard him transmit a message to the air tanker that was already airborne with 3000 gallons of bentonite retardant. When the fire retardant is mixed with water, a pink dye is added so the pilot and other firemen can see the pattern of an air drop. The Bird Dog pilot instructed the air tanker pilots to come across the Bull Gap and follow him.

Boy this was really an exciting time for Don and I. This wasn't the first time I had ordered in the big ships to knock down a fire somewhere, or to lay out a fire line along a ridge to halt the progress of a blow up so fire fighters could get near it. As we watched, the burning tree was really scattering sparks, and every single one was a potential spot fire, and each spot fire could very easily turn into an inferno.

When I ordered the air tanker, immediately I had my Fire Control Technician round up ten men and head them toward Neil Creek by way of Bull Gap. I would meet with the foreman and give him last minute orders.

They were to bring 500 feet of linen fire hose. It is lighter to carry, and there is 100 feet to a roll. Add two gravity socks. It would not be necessary to

have a portable fire pump dropped in on the fire. Of course, each man would carry standard fire fighting tools, plus a couple power saws with men that knew how to use them.

As Don and I waited, we could hear the big air tanker coming, but it sounded far off. We saw the Bird Dog plane sail across Bull Gap. Soon, here came the big four-motored plane carrying 3000 gallons of retardant, right over the Bull Gap saddle. He was flying slow, sort of like an old cold yellow jacket.

He followed the pattern the lead plane made. The tanker lost elevation and flew down canyon. He circled around and came back so he could make his pass away from the mountainside.

Slowly the monster ship came around toward the fire. He was so low it looked like he was hitting tree tops. One load was released and the pink-colored bentonite liquid struck and knocked down the top half of the tree. He made another pass from the same direction, took aim, and down went the rest of the burning tree. He made a wide circle to gain altitude and took in after the lead plane.

The Bird Dog pilot flew low over Don and I, and dipped his wings. I told him we could mop it up. They really had done a fine job. When the air tanker flew over us, he, too, dipped his right wing, and headed back to the air tanker base.

From Bull Gap down to the fire was a short distance for ten rugged men. I talked to the foreman about if water was available. There was but only a trickle, but that would be enough.

I had taught him and several other men what those funny canvas funnels were one day when someone uncovered them in our basement warehouse. There were two sizes as for length. One was three foot long, and the other one was five feet. The top ends were wide across, maybe two foot, with a steel ring around the opening. It tapered down to a 1½ inch screw-on fitting so a standard fire hose could be attached.

The foreman had fashioned a trough from a long chunk of tree bark. He rigged up a small dam to collect water, and it would flow from it down the trough into the top of the gravity sock.

The hose filled quickly. In fact, the crew had enough water to fill the rubber five gallon back pack pumps and release some through a spray nozzle to blast into hot spots. There is such a pressure build up. If the hose goes downhill for more than 400 feet it will blow a new hose. The pressure is great.

The foreman had fun showing the other men how great this invention was. Anyone else would have dropped in a portable pump, and it wouldn't have been near as effective. And someone would have had to pack it out.

Since things were well in hand, Don and I departed for home with another forest fire behind us. We took one last look from Bull Gap. When the air tanker had dumped his first load it knocked the top part of the tree down. The second drop put the rest of it down. The way the long logs landed

resembled the shape of airplane's wings the way they were spread out. It was then that we gave it the name, Airplane Fire.

Every single fire coined a name and number so we could refer back to their records, where the fires were, what and how much was burned, and many other important fire suppression details.

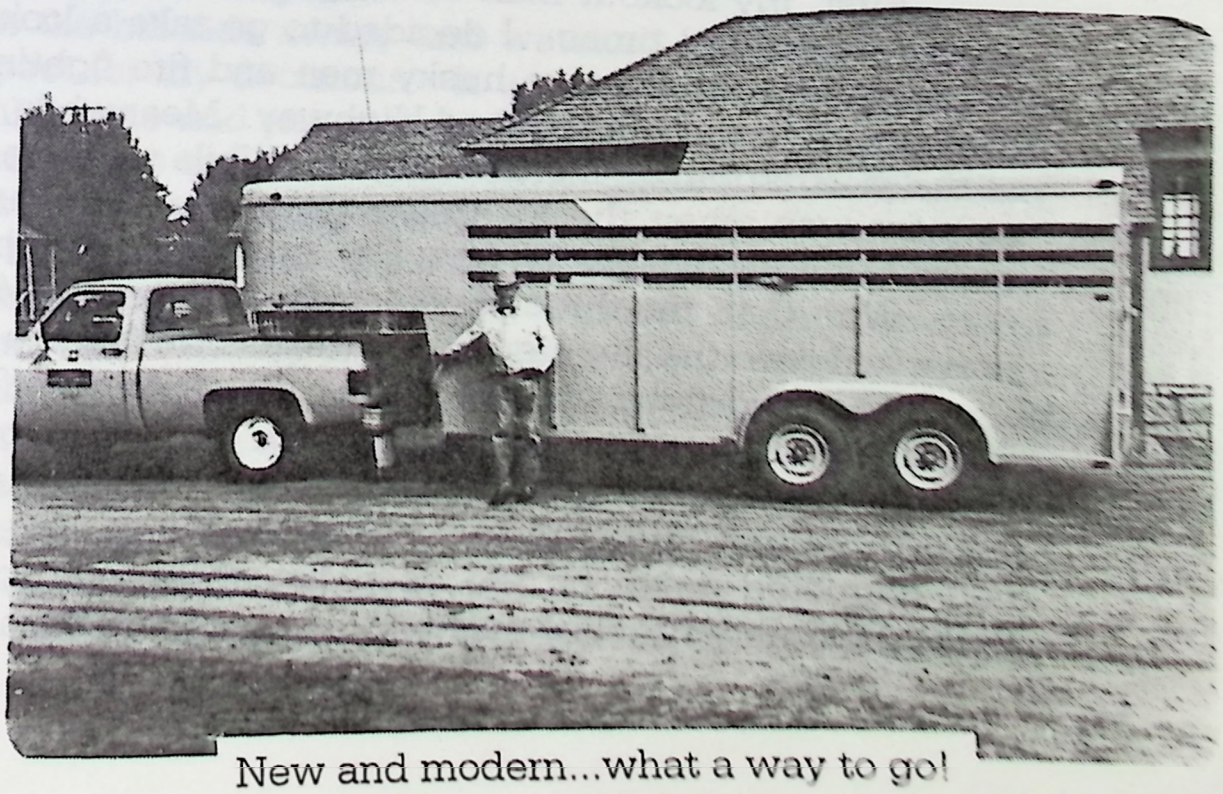
In years to come it turned out that Don and I were on a lot of bad fires together. He became an instructor, and was the boss on most fires he was on. Between the two of us we agreed it was a great life to live. There were never any two minutes alike.

Old Wagner Butte Lookout.

Gordon by the Wagner Butte flag pole with Don and Snoopy.

Old Union Creek Ranger Station.

This is the life!



New and modern...what a way to go!

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE
DANGEROUS, LIFE-THREATENING TREE FIRES

During my 31 years working for the United States Forest Service, there were two types of work that really made it a "one in a million career". Those were the years I worked with the Government mules and horses, and riding with the cattle men from the Rogue River Valley, and the hundreds of forest fires I witnessed as Fire Boss, Camp Boss, Sector Boss, etc. The stories are numerous, hair-raising, and certainly life-threatening.

My men and I were caught in blow-ups caused by wind change or spot fires, overcome by smoke, worked in rattlesnake and poison oak country, but the hairiest times were when a sudden wind shift like a whirlwind would cause burning tree tops to twist off and carry chunks on fire, that were longer than a man's arm, for half a mile or more, kindling another forest fire.

Many a time I've set in the saddle on my horse, and watched a forest die on a mountainside across the canyon. But, one of the spookiest incidents I've ever seen was when a burning tree top came down for reasons we never knew. Wind shifts play tricks on a feller, especially when a fire is burning hot.

When I was a Fire Control Officer on the Ashland District, it was interesting to note where lightning seemed to strike most if a storm was in certain areas. There is a place called McDonald Basin, south of Wagner Gap, beyond Freezeout Cabin. There is a year 'round stream, called Split Rock Creek, and to the east is a ridge, called Split Rock. This seemed to be where lightning struck fairly often for reasons unknown to me.

There was one hot strike touched down and set fire to a Douglas Fir tree. The ground fire wasn't too big, because the storm was full of ice, shaped like ½ inch hail stones.

First, my lookout man on Wagner Butte said the Siskiyou Summit had gotten hit several times. I decided to go take a look and find out what was going on. I grabbed two husky men and fire fighting tools, and headed up Interstate 5 to the Mt. Ashland Highway. Meanwhile, my technician took over at the plotting table. It was 9:30 p.m. While we were en route to Mt. Ashland country was when the Fir tree was touched off southwest of Split Rock. I heard him dispatch the Wagner Gap guard to heard that way.

With that, the three of us decided to head for McDonald Basin and drive down and give the fireman a hand, unless we found a fire first.

The road down into McDonald Basin drops off the Divide to the north, rather abruptly. It switchbacks down across an open, bare glade. Grass doesn't even grow there. The moment we left the glade and entered the timber, the front of my pickup buried itself in a three foot deep drift of hail. It had peppered down on the open flat above and rolled down the hill. The timber and underbrush caused it to stop and make the drift.

We could see the fire about two miles on ahead, on the south side of a flat ridge. I called the dispatcher and told him the story. He said there were three men on the fire and we should return to home base. There was no need to walk to the fire.

Before we left, I tried to buck the drift and blame near got struck. One of the men tried walking aways further. He sank down into two and three foot drifts of hail. It was colored with dirt and fir needles, and very difficult to tell mounds of hail from mounds of dirt.

We returned to headquarters and called it a night. There could very well be more fires show up come daylight. I was at my office before daylight; so was my Fire Dispatcher. All the lookouts were looking for fires. The three man crew spent the night at the Split Rock fire.

About 9 a.m., Wagner Butte reported another smoke. It was just about a mile away from the fire we saw the night before. It was located in a shallow draw, and the main McDonald Basin Road went right past it.

I was determined to get in on the action, and headed back to the tall and uncut with the same two men who were with me the night before. That way I could see how the other crew was doing, too.

This time we went up the Wagner Butte Road to Wagner Gap. From there it wasn't too far to either fire. It was maybe another mile and a half to the new one.

Our fire was in the top 30 feet of a tall Doug Fir, old growth tree, about 100 feet below the road. It was burning hot and showering sparks everywhere. I was surprised to see two men already on the scene. They walked up from their fire earlier.

They were busy knocking down spot fires that were smoldering away in some of the sheltered areas. We set to, to build us a fire line and wait for the top of the tree to burn off and fall. It was getting close to lunch time, and the men had been up and at 'em for a long time.

I walked back on the hill side aways and watched my men build line. These fellows had respect for my decisions. It was time for them to take a break. I felt they should come and join me, and we would eat lunch a little early. We sat and watched the tree top burn. It was leaning downhill, away from where all five of us had been digging line.

As we watched, a strange thing happened. A sudden whirlwind came up the draw and went right over the burning tree. We had to hang on to our hard hats to keep them on. The top 40 feet of the tree straightened up, twisted half way around, and fell right in our tracks, the ones we had made just moments before. It rolled down about three feet, and was inside our line. We never even had to jump in and start immediate mop up.

One of the men said, "Boy, you really called us out of there at the right time. I believe you just saved our lives!"

Then I told them how I had felt it was real urgent for us to break for

lunch a little early. Many times during my life I have faced near disaster, except for a feeling or some sort of action or command from someone that saved my life or the life of someone else.

On two occasions when I was on a raging forest fire on the Tahoe National Forest, I prevented my 20 man crew from being caught in a serious blow up, only by insisting they follow my orders, instead of another man's, who thought he knew best. But, the times I remember best were when there was just two or more men with me.

In 1979, the good old Government decided to consolidate Prospect and Union Creek Districts. The purpose was to eliminate eleven different positions on the forest to save money. It just didn't happen that way, but rather wound up costing more than ever before. I lost my Fire Control Officer job, and wound up with a Resource Assistant job that was formerly held down by two professional men. I was a non-professional. The difference between the two is a college education. But the nice thing about it for me, I was still in the driver's seat. Only now I was handling a totally different can of worms. I still reported directly to a District Ranger.

Because of my background in fire control, the fire people called on me to take on some fires that were tough to get to or knock down. Such was the case right after a lightning bust in Hershberger Mountain country.

After talking to two different lookouts, I put my own fire report together. Hershberger Mountain was the primary one and Stella Mountain gave me a cross shot. That way it would be no problem going right to it.

They gave me one man who worked timber management. He was sort of a big guy, and didn't know too much about anything, the way it appeared. But, he was husky, and maybe could be told how to dig fire line. He was also a little on the hot-headed side besides being clumsy.

We traveled north on the Hershberger Mountain Road to within a couple miles of the Lookout. At that point we headed toward a ridge top, about due east. We never walked more than a half mile until we saw smoke coming up, caused by a hot fire.

The going was good. We carried a power chain saw and various digging tools. Our fire was in the top of a tree that had been zapped by a lightning strike. A part of the tree that was dry and rotten was set ablaze immediately. The base, or tree butt, was at least five feet through.

The big, clumsy guy put the saw down near a boulder, grabbed a shovel and headed for the burning tree, prepared to start throwing dirt on the hot spots caused by falling chunks of wood and bark. I yelled at him and told the guy to stay way back. "Let it burn", I said, because the top of the tree was burning hot at a place down about 40 or more feet from the top. But, the crazy nut seemed to be hard of hearing.

He started to run in close with another shovel full of dirt. I yelled at him to stand back and get up where I was. I'm not sure what changed his mind,

but he headed at me like maybe he wanted to argue. Seems as though he thought things should go his way because the so-called Fire Control Boss was his best friend.

I started to set him straight in no uncertain terms, when, suddenly, without warning, the whole top came crashing down right where the big shot had stood just less than a minute before.

That certainly was an eye opener for him. In fact, he sat down by the power saw and turned white as a sheet. I never felt a bit sorry for him, in the least.

I had saved another man's life and for that I was glad. We fell the remaining part of the tree, put a line around the burned area and mopped it up. One of us would return the next day and make sure the fire was dead out.

A tree or snag that is burning high up is so unpredictable, especially at night. I have stood back out of reach and waited out a good many of them, because, no way was it worth taking a chance.

During the 31 years I worked for the United States Forest Service, I was active on 360 fires. On a good many of those fires I was a Camp Boss, Fire Boss, Sector Boss, or guide for bulldozers building fire line in hazardous country. My favorite level was Sector Boss. It put me in command of a lot of men and equipment. Safety for the men was always foremost in my mind.

In all those years and fires there were only two injuries among my people. One guy got too careless and whacked his foot with the cutting side of a Pulaski. Another guy didn't take my advice and stay off a steep fire line in loose granite soil. Instead of walking down the mountain in the timber next to the line, he headed down where it was open going. The granite soil is like walking on tiny marbles.

He lost his footing and fell, sliding downhill for nearly a hundred feet, and crashed into a clump of live oak trees. He suffered a broken right ankle and twisted left knee, saying nothing about a lot of worn off hide. I didn't feel a blame bit sorry for him, because I told the guy exactly what would happen. We called in a stretcher and packed him off the mountain.

But, the best, most colorful, exciting fires I ever put out were the ones where I chased the smoke alone or with one other man. That was what I thought of as pure delight. A fun thing to do. I always found my fire or where it had been burning, or the places where some lookout figured there was a fire. False smokes were a common threat to a smoke chaser who meant business.

In a way, it is too bad that the U.S. Forest Service doesn't operate today like they did back then. But, there are too many big shots that think they know a better way to do things that is totally false.

The colorful life a smoke chaser lived back then is a forgotten way to fight a forest killer. Small wonder fires get a head start and burn up the country, but for the lack of one single man to get it while it was small.